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“i Was Meant To Be A Student:” A Qualitative Inquiry Into Adult Undergraduate Learning Practices In Adult Learning-Focused Institutions

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Abstract

This study examined adult learning practices in adult learning-focused postsecondary institutions.

Using semi-structured phenomenographic interviews, course observations, and site observations at two Midwestern adult-focused postsecondary institutions, this year-long study applied an intersectional sociocultural framework toward understanding adult learning practices, with emphasis on their characteristics, goals, and influences.

Results of the study suggest that all participants specifically chose their institution based on perceived alignment with their ages, learning styles, and schedules. They also suggest that students’ challenging personal contexts contributed favorably to students’ decisions to enroll. Students generally attributed institutional factors with posing the biggest challenges to their learning engagement, course planning, and completion, rather than their often significant personal obstacles.

Participants also emphasized the sacrifices necessary to prioritize time for college in their complex schedules. They described the experience and impact of college-related stress on their professional and personal lives, yet they affirmed college as their highest priority despite these challenges. They also described avoiding shortcuts in their coursework, often prioritizing time-consuming approaches to deepen and challenge their learning.

Supplementary practitioner interviews indicated divergent perspectives on students’ commitment, motivation, and use of time. Many characterized their students as spending insufficient time on or insufficiently prioritizing their college education. However, contradictions within their perspectives also suggest a positive association between their specificity student-related talk and more nuanced or affirmative perspectives on student lives and learning.

Findings extend existing research on adult undergraduate learning practices, most importantly in the context of adult learning-focused institutions. They also provide directions for future research on adults’ learning practices, choices, and academic literacies, with implications for informing adult-focused instructional, tutoring, and advising practices and policies.

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“I WAS MEANT TO BE A STUDENT:” A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY
INTO ADULT UNDERGRADUATE LEARNING PRACTICES
IN ADULT LEARNING-FOCUSED INSTITUTIONS

Danielle Nicole Mollene Gioia

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Danielle Nicole Mollene Gioia

DEDICATION

to my mother, Mollene D'Amore. My inspiration and my example.

to my sister, Andrea Speranza. My first and best learning partner.

and

to my husband, Joshua Steinberg. I can't imagine someone more compassionate, loving, and supportive. Luckily, I don't have to.

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contributed to this study—all my gratitude and admiration are yours. To the practitioners who facilitated my study approval and contributed insights of their own—please know how much I appreciate your time, support, and hospitality.

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advocate for her students. She extended herself just as generously and supportively to me. Hours were spent talking over tea, about our own educational journeys and, most importantly, what it means to support and learn from our students.

At her funeral, student after student stood in testimony to Zöe's life and example. Her belief in them. Her investment in their lives and education. Her dedication. Her guidance. Her support. Her love.

How lucky I am to have known her, too.

ABSTRACT

“I WAS MEANT TO BE A STUDENT:” A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO ADULT UNDERGRADUATE LEARNING PRACTICES IN ADULT LEARNING-FOCUSED INSTITUTIONS

Danielle Nicole Mollene Gioia

Vivian L. Gadsden

This study examined adult learning practices in adult learning-focused postsecondary institutions. Using semi-structured phenomenographic interviews, course observations, and site observations at two Midwestern adult-focused postsecondary institutions, this year-long study applied an intersectional sociocultural framework toward understanding adult learning practices, with emphasis on their characteristics, goals, and influences.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	vii
List of Tables.....	xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Adult undergraduates in higher education.....	6
Adult learning-focused postsecondary institutions.....	10
Key terms and definitions.....	13
Purpose.....	15
Research questions.....	16
Significance.....	17
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	18
Theories and constructions of adult learning.....	19
Institutional impacts on student learning.....	25
Higher education's changing pathways and discourses.....	27
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	32
Frameworks.....	32
Site selection.....	43
IRB procedures and schedule.....	45
Recruitment procedures and schedules.....	46
Data collection.....	52
Data analysis.....	62
Limitations.....	68
INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS	72
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ST. CLARE UNIVERSITY	74
Institutional profile.....	74
Student participants.....	76
Primary learning themes.....	76
Primary learning influences.....	92
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, MISSION UNIVERSITY	111
Institutional profile.....	111
Student participants.....	112
Primary learning themes.....	113
Primary learning influences.....	123
CHAPTER 6: CROSS-SITE DISCUSSION OF THEMES	142
Theme 1: Student use of time.....	142
Theme 2: The role of reflection in student learning.....	161
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION	187
Study design and scope.....	187
Findings.....	188
Contributions to research.....	191
Implications for future research.....	194
Reflection.....	198

Appendices.....	199
Appendix A: Interview protocols.....	199
Appendix B: Recruitment handout.....	210
Appendix C: Informed consent forms.....	212
Appendix D: Coding phases, schedule, and duration.....	222
References.....	229

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Course Observation Field Note Excerpt.....	56
Table 2. Data Collection Type, Encounter Date, and Pseudonym Inventory.....	61

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

College-going represents a potent symbol of achievement and civic participation in American society, with debates about access and affordability at the forefront (Carnevale, 2010; Harkavy, 2006). However, the associated discourses around higher education, especially in relation to adults, are predominantly concerned with workforce development (Jacobson, 2016). The Obama administration has demonstrated particularly active engagement with these issues, and most recently established a bold goal for higher education attainment by 2020. In response to projected growth among jobs requiring an associate's degree to significantly outpace jobs requiring no degree, the 2020 goal calls for every American to participate in at least one year of community college or career training (AACE, 2010). This goal targets the attainment of certificates and credentials, in addition to degrees, for five million new students by 2020 (AACE, 2015).

This increased attention to the public role of community colleges, along with proposals for drastically decreasing community college costs through a combination of tuition relief and grant access, has conferred greater legitimacy to sub-baccalaureate pathways and credentials (Bailey & Belfield, 2013). These moves also signal responsiveness to ongoing calls among nonprofits and state agencies to increase postsecondary degree attainment to at least 50 percent, as affirmed by the President's continued call for the U.S. to "once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (Perna, 2010, p.7). However, this increased emphasis on multiple postsecondary pathways corresponds with increased conflation of college completion with individual workforce participation and national economic growth. It also serves to sublimate attention to the sociocultural and economic disparities that mark both tacit and explicit tracking into under-resourced postsecondary programs (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010).

According to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), 65% of jobs by 2020 will require a college degree, but only 39% of adults currently possess a degree (<http://www.cael.org/higher-education/adult-student-champions>). Further, Erisman and Steele (2015) identify a lack of data representing the educational attributes and demographics of students possessing some college but no degree, a high proportion of which are adults attending adult learning-focused institutions. When situated in conversation with the growing emphasis on credentialing alternatives to college degrees that are largely targeted to adults, these messages can be understood to obfuscate rather than clarify what is meant by a college education, including for whom it is intended; how and in what contexts it is valued; and who is, can, and/or should be a college student.

The current political valence of these issues is inextricably tied to the growth of postsecondary pathways and how they have come to be situated within the higher education landscape. As the nation's elite four-year colleges and universities become increasingly selective and expensive, pathways to less selective and open-access institutions have expanded (Bahr, 2013; Scott-Clayton, 2012). The largest and most prominent of these is the community college. Since their 1901 inception, community colleges have come to represent the biggest American system of higher education (Handel & Williams, 2012). They represent a dual social function: (1) widening postsecondary access and opportunity to include students underprepared for, tracked away from, priced out of, or otherwise deterred from baccalaureate degree programs, and (2) extending a transfer pipeline to four year colleges and universities.

From their junior college roots, designed to offer a preliminary two year liberal arts education or technical workforce-oriented training, they have emerged as complex sites of education that span multiple roles across academic, social, and business domains. Across multiple states, their scope of articulation agreements and partnerships have begun to encompass baccalaureate

conferral (Russell, 2010). They also represent rich sites of data that continue to lend valuable dimension to the national picture of higher education demographics and outcomes (Mullin, Bers, & Hagedorn, 2012). Research suggests that these colleges do make good on their democratizing purpose by extending higher education access and socioeconomic mobility, although the measureable outcomes concerning the latter remain in question (Grubb, 1997; Park & Pascarella, 2010; Pascarella et al., 1998). Yet doubts persist about whether and to what extent their open-access admissions and concomitant pedagogical and advising frameworks function as a wedge against rather than a lever for student progression and mobility (Alfred, 2002; Karabel, 1986; Park & Pascarella, 2010; Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Questions about the implications of their increasing scope—characterized by Grubb (2012) as the “dilemma of comprehensiveness” (xii, in Beach, 2012)—have also emerged. Such concerns join longstanding debate over issues such as the “cooling out” function of community colleges, in which students are advised to discontinue transfer pathways and instead shift into terminal or non-degree tracks (Hellmich, 1994). While some maintain that “cooling out” is a supportive function of the community college that “like democracy—is not very attractive until you consider its alternatives” (Clark, 2006, from abstract), others increasingly criticize its perpetuation of a false meritocracy, highlighting the disproportionate harm that it levies upon students of color and students coming from low SES backgrounds (Dowd, 2006; Rhoades & Valdez, 1996).

In light of such issues, it is easier to understand arguments that contemporary community colleges’ impressive growth remains anchored in increasingly ill-fitting foundation reflective of a historical movement to stratify rather than enlarge higher education (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Davies & Guppy, 1997). As McGrath and Spear (1991) point out, they may have expanded beyond the narrow scope and social purposes this history but “have not overcome it” (p. 11). They remain a nexus of “competing” voices, one claiming “education for all, while the softer and

more troubled voice questions whether education should be the same for all, and wonders what open-access institutions can really promise their students” (McGrath & Spear, 1991, p. 11).

This active reshaping and redefinition of college pathways lends both urgency and promise to ongoing research and debate about college access, equity, outcomes, and purposes. Yet the nuances of adult college-going practices, most particularly in the context of adult-focused postsecondary institutions, are persistently absent from these conversations. No longer a minority population in higher education, adults over 25 are now estimated to make up roughly half of all undergraduates in the U.S. (Coulter & Mandell, 2012; Kasworm, 2003). Undergraduate enrollments nationwide rose 37% between 2000 and 2010, corresponding with a 42% increase of adult undergraduates over the age of 25 in that decade, exceeding that of 18-24-year-olds’ 37% increase (NCES, Digest of Education Statistics, 2011, 2012). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) similarly projects a faster rate of growth for adult undergraduates over 25 for 2010-2020 – 20%, in contrast with the projected 11% for undergraduates age 18-24 (NCES, Digest of Education Statistics, 2011, 2012). However, while these numbers demonstrate a powerful shift, their implications for higher education are magnified when coupled with corresponding shifts in college-going contexts that further blur the boundaries between “traditional” and “nontraditional” student.

One of the major shifts is the role of work among undergraduates of all ages. Despite the traditional picture of residential undergraduates who work no more than 20 hours a week, and preferably less, “working is now the norm even among traditional undergraduates” (Perna, 2010, p. 1). Independent undergraduate hours, historically high, are now estimated to average nearly 35 hours each week, while dependent undergraduates’ weekly work hours have increased to a weekly average of 24 hours (Perna, 2010; Perna et al., 2007). Yet prevailing attitudes, instantiated in traditional college and university policies, programming, and practice, still consider substantial

work commitments detrimental. As Perna (2010) points out, however, such recommendations “presume to ‘fix’ nontraditional students to fit the pattern of the ‘ideal’ traditional undergraduate, thereby ignoring the realities and complexities of adult students’ lives” (p. 3). CAEL notes that the increasing attention to issues of affordability and access remain important to adult postsecondary students, but, in an echo of Engstrom and Tinto’s 2008 article “Access Without Support is Not Opportunity,” they emphasize that these are only the first steps in creating conditions for student success (CAEL, “Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success,” 2010).

Adult undergraduates, and the types of postsecondary institutions that espouse responsiveness to their specific contexts, represent a unique confluence of cross-cultural population and institutional responsiveness within the landscape of higher education. Both individually and collectively, they suggest provocative questions about changing relationships between and across students, faculty, and institutions—especially in light of the fact that (1) non-traditional pathways can no longer be considered an automatic stopgap to or failure of academic achievement, and (2) the rapid growth of so-called “nontraditional” adult students are equally rapidly reframing mainstream understanding of normative college student characteristics, identities, and contexts. Yet dominant ideologies and discourses have not similarly evolved. Sissel, Hansman, and Kasworm (2001) illuminate how deeply embedded deficit messages about adult undergraduates are throughout academic and public discourse. Observing how commonplace terms like “nontraditional” and “reentry” are, they note that any benefits of a term that easily identifies adult undergraduates are overshadowed by the implications of neediness and marginality that they confer. Their explanation of the “other”-ing weight carried by “mere descriptors” is incisive:

...such language is political, not only because of the lack of privilege it may signify but because labels on learners affect expectations and influence the actions of educators. As Rist (1970, 1972) and others (Good and Brophy, 1971; Rubovits and Maehr, 1973; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1973; Persell, 1976; Tisdell, 1993; Sadker and Sadker, 1994; Swadener and Lubeck, 1995) have explicated, the expectations of educators are political. The view that educators hold about students affects how and what they teach, to whom, and whether they privilege students' life experiences, perspectives, and participation or work to diminish those insights and efforts. (Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001, p. 19).

As Rose (1989) makes clear throughout his autobiographical *Lives on the Boundary*, these kinds of discursive constructions falsely solidify boundaries around schooling, and they further mute the already “‘silent conversation” about academic conventions, expectations, and identities that can serve to marginalize adult students in traditional higher education settings (Casanave & Li, 2008). The white noise of public and political discourse about who belongs in school distorts messages about college-going identities, opportunities, and expectations alike, pitting the complicated realities of adult lives against who they are—or were—expected to become.

Adult Undergraduates in Higher Education

Since the 1970s, the percent of adult students in higher education, commonly defined as being over the age of 25, has grown from almost 30 percent of total undergraduate enrollment to over 50 percent (Coulter & Mandell, 2012; Kasworm, 2003). As noted prior, their growth has consistently outpaced that of students aged 18-24 between 2000 and 2010 by nearly 10 percent, with that pattern projected to hold through 2020 (NCES, 2012). However, there exists a relative paucity in higher education literature regarding this increasingly significant number of older postsecondary participants in the U.S. and the institutions at which they are most prominent represented (Donaldson & Rentfro, 2006; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). In their discussion of this disparity, Donaldson & Rentfro ask: “Are adult students ‘other,’ different, and more needful and deficient when compared to traditional age students? Or, are adult students individuals who also belong in the academy and enrich it by virtue of their presence?” (2006, p.

7).

The limited body of research that does address adult undergraduate students' academic experience overwhelmingly focuses on the domains of community college, on the one hand, and on traditional colleges and universities on the other (Kasworm, 2004; Kasworm & Pike, 1994). Studies largely attend to one or more of what Cross (1976, 1981) defined as the main barriers facing adults in higher education: dispositional, situational, institutional, and informational. The dispositional construct tends to dominate such conversations even when other barriers are explicitly or implicitly at play, with themes of motivation and resistance often highlighted (Brockett, 1994; Flippo & Caverly, 2000, 2008; Hiemstra, 1994; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Sissel, 2001; Sternberg & Caruso, 1985; Wlodkowski, 2008, 2011). In such conversations, student characteristics are often overdetermined as the locus for needed change, as opposed to more generatively complicated framing of student agency within situational and institutional contexts.

Studies also suggest corresponding faculty and administration misunderstanding of adult students, with growing emphasis on the misalignment of student and faculty expectations and values (Cahill et al., 2010; Cox, 2010; Groves & Groves, 1980; Jacobs & Hundley, 2010; Kasworm, 2004, 2010; Mullins & Park, 2008; Taylor et al., 2000). However, studies that are more attentive to the sociocultural dimensions of adult learning and to how they are situated in higher education are challenged by the lack of empirical and theoretical models specific to adult undergraduates, and most studies concerned with the development of alternate models are based on adult-specific or mixed-age cohorts in community college or traditional four-year college or university settings (Alfred, 2002; Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002; Merriam, 2001). Such gaps suggest that despite their major, growing presence in higher education, adult undergraduates

“are judged to be other, to be less than the standard, and to be of limited potency related to the impact of a higher education” (Sissel et al, 2003, p. 25).

Another trend in research on adult undergraduates are studies that overemphasize students of color in relation to academic challenge and/or disadvantage, and/or more broadly associate diverse learner characteristics with academic and acculturative challenges (Carter, Locks, & Wagner, 2013, in Paulson [Ed.], 2013; Deil-Amen, 2011; Flippo & Caverly, 2000, 2008; Guiffrida, 2006; Kasworm, 2008). They also collectively demonstrate ways in which student age is encoded within higher education discourse as disadvantage and, in a troubling reminder of the deficit ideology embedded in the American school system, ways in which disadvantage is often encoded as race. The arc of such representation is reflective of persistent anxieties about diversity more broadly, in relation to normative ideologies about academic identities, responsibilities, merit, and power (Quinnan, 1997; Saxonhouse, 2002; Stephens & Townsend, 2013).

Sissel, Hansman, and Kasworm (2001) summarize that “[W]hether it is policy, program, attitudes, classroom environment, or funding support, adult learners face institutional neglect, prejudice, and denial of opportunities (p. 18). The need for more and more complex inquiry into the intersections of structure, culture, and practices at adult-focused postsecondary institutions seems clear. Missing from the current frameworks for such inquiry, however, remain four-year institutions in which adult students comprise the majority population.

Broadly speaking, what is known about adult undergraduates is most commonly situated in conversations about access, retention, and success (Brown, 2012). These are clearly essential factors in postsecondary learning conditions for students of all ages. However, *what* those learning practices for adult undergraduates look like, and *how* they are situated, enacted, and mediated in increasingly adult-focused institutions, is less understood. There remains need to continue the important research into how adult students are situated in, experience, navigate, and

succeed in community college and traditional four-year college and university contexts. Yet it is also becoming increasingly critical to expand on what is currently known by looking beyond these institutional contexts and, specifically, at the characteristics and affordances of adult-focused four-year colleges. In 1999, Donaldson and Graham noted that “adult students apparently learn and grow as much or more than younger students during their undergraduate collegiate experience,” noting that they “may be” using different skills or interactions (p. 26). The lack of specific methodological engagement and representation of adult undergraduates, institutions, and learning practices hampers research and practice in multiple ways, including but not limited to (1) constraining or biasing the ways in which adult undergraduates and adult-focused institutions are individually and collectively defined, represented, and understood; and (2) conferring a misleading steadiness to the currently drawn profiles of national student and institutional demographics, characteristics, and roles.

It is in these contexts that this study examines adult undergraduate learning acts and processes within the context of adult learning-focused postsecondary institutions. These institutional contexts suggest important addition to the currently incomplete, deficit-contoured picture of adult undergraduates. Student pursuit of baccalaureate degrees suggests additional relevance in the context of dominant public association of associate’s degree pursuit as the primary pathway or endpoint for adult learners. It is also interested in how students construct learning practices and experiences as part of these adult learning-focused postsecondary institutions that currently occupy a liminal space within the two-tiered higher education hierarchy.

Adult Learning-Focused Postsecondary Institutions

Neglect of adult learners is widespread throughout sites of higher education despite their increasing numbers (Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). The implications their under- and misrepresentation across programs, missions, and policies are multiple. As Sissel, Hansman, and Kasworm (2001) comprehensively summarize, “adults are often institutionally invisible, marginalized, and taken for granted (Sissel, Birdsong, and Silaski, 1997), viewed as at-risk burdens or cash-cow boons (Richardson and King, 1998), or systematically ignored by the field of higher education (Sissel, 2001)” (p. 18). However, amidst the obscurity of adult-serving missions across the literature, there do exist institutions responsive to or wholly dedicated to serving adult undergraduates (Council for Adult Experiential Learning, 2000; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). Unfortunately, these institutions’ limited representation in higher education literature is matched by the similarly limited picture of their characteristics and numbers afforded by the main national sources of data and classification systems.

Often called adult-focused or adult-friendly four-year institutions, they are found in both non-profit and for-profit sectors, include both public and private status, and can encompass both applied and traditional baccalaureate degree programs (Townsend & Ruud, 2008). Given that more research and dialogue has been directed toward two-year colleges, this study focuses on four-year colleges. The specific term “Adult Learning-Focused Institution” was developed by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and stands out as the only systematic attempt to name and define categorize what constitutes an adult-focused postsecondary institutions. To date, ALFI remains the main recognizable label, though not consistently or frequently appearing in literature beyond CAEL and member institution reports. Acknowledging the affordances and challenges of employing a single definition within these multiple contexts, this study draws its operational definition for its selected sites from CAEL’s Adult Learning-

Focused Institutions (ALFI) framework.

ALFIs are described as institutions “friendly” to the “unique needs” of adult learners, demonstrated by their participation in the ALFI Coalition, “an alliance of CAEL member colleges and universities that strive continuously to improve their programs and services for adult learners. Coalition participants use the ALFI Assessment Tools to assess their programs regularly and share “best practices” with other institutions” (CAEL, Not Too Late For School, 2012). Through these recent studies and networks, CAEL has established a “gold standard” framework for defining and assessing the level of institutional responsiveness to adult undergraduates, with a focus on career-based advising support (Bash, 2003; CAEL, 2012).

Thanks to CAEL, there is now a robust research and reporting mechanism that has begun to piece together an increasingly contoured picture of the range of adult-focused four-year institutions that offer access and pathway opportunities comparable to community colleges, while at the same time offering a four-year educational experience, degree tracks, and ostensible associated mobility conferral more reflective of traditional colleges and universities. Yet, again, despite the encouraging growth of CAEL’s benchmarking and survey scope, and the fruitful conversations that are taking place across these individual participating institutions, their findings are seldom addressed across higher education research.

These institutions might thus still be considered to occupy a liminal status, of sorts, within standardized national classifications as well as discourse. Also, beyond the specific contexts of CAEL’s ALFI designation, they do not have other consistent or widely taken up operational definitions or labels. The Carnegie classification of Baccalaureate Colleges defines a conferral requirement of least 10% baccalaureate degrees yet no more than 20% doctoral degrees or 50 Master’s degrees annually (Carnegie, n.d.d.). Given the relative lack of literature on the adult-focused sites of interest to this study, it is difficult to identify with sufficient trustworthiness what

proportion of adult-focused colleges may be seated within this category. Also of note is that the classification of Associate's Colleges, which are defined as conferring only bachelor's and associate's degrees and account for only 10% of all undergraduate degrees, is overwhelmingly represented in category and literature by two-year colleges, again leaving out the four-year adult-focused colleges to which this study seeks to attend.

Also relevant to this picture is the documented lack of alignment between the Carnegie system—which, broadly, groups by size, focus, and demographic—and other population-specific institutions like HBCUs (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2005; Coaxum, 2001). Adult-focused institutions represent similar alignment challenges, especially as traditional-age students across all institutional types are shifting toward more so-called “nontraditional” enrollment and attendance patterns, thus blurring demographic categories (NCES, 2002, 2008; Kim & Rury, 2011; Mancuso, 2001).

Among the sectors and categories in which adult-focused postsecondary institutions are represented, for-profit and corporate institutions have grown rapidly and are the subject of increasing attention in the literature (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011, <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org>). Representing what Bash (2003) calls a “challenge [to] the very foundation of higher education,” they are sites of “nimble, entrepreneurially-focused innovations” (p. 32). However, they also reflect a lack of institutional consistency, inhibiting systematic replication (Bash, 2003). Finance and recruitment controversies have also followed them, contributing further to a provocative backdrop for ongoing debates about the intersections of education access and quality with market demand and economic outcomes (Berg, 2005; Cellini & Chaudhary, 2012). Less debate has been located within the non-profit sector, with quantitative benchmarking for adult-focused practices predominating the limited amount of research available (CAEL, 2007, 2011; Mancuso, 2001). However, despite their greater alignment with the

institutional configurations and mission of traditional colleges and universities, this is mirrored by a persistent relative lack of academic and public conversation about such institutions.

While CAEL represents a rich, generative, and encouraging foundation for ongoing engagement with and support of adult learning-focused institutions, it is also prominent by virtue of its singularity, and it has yet to be widely taken up across higher education literature. One of the most significant implications is that it also dominates the empirical and conceptual landscape of study on adult “friendly” postsecondary institutions. Higher education research, broadly speaking, has yet to attend to how its adult learning-focused institutional benchmarking has defined and influenced adult-focused higher education discourse between and across institutional type, research, and practice. Broader conceptual and methodological engagement is warranted, toward enlarging, rather than solidifying, existing conversation around the learning cultures of such institutions, in which adult learning is mediated as part of a majority or sole adult undergraduate population. As both the demands for and pressures on adult college-going continue to increase throughout higher education’s progressively more fraught sociocultural and economic contexts, the need for more nuanced qualitative research into how this growing majority of undergraduates are situated and succeed within adult-specific environments becomes significant. It has never been more relevant to explore what college-going and learning look like when adult undergraduates are embraced as a majority rather than cast as marginal participants (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Rose, 1989; Kasworm et al., 2010; Sissel, 2001; Sissel et al., 2001).

Key Terms and Definitions

Adult Undergraduate

While there exists occasional variance in the age criteria or emphasis for defining an “adult” undergraduate, most education research aligns with the National Center for Education Statistics

(NCES) baseline of age 25 or older (NCES, 2009; Ross-Gordon, 2011). The present study follows this criterion. It also employs the term “adult undergraduate” to signal student participation in baccalaureate degree programs and to distinguish participants from scholarship and discourses that frame the term “adult learner” as more commonly associated with sub-baccalaureate degree programs and credentials. Adult undergraduates have also been assigned more qualitative labels across education research and public discourse, the most common of which is “nontraditional” (Ross-Gordon, 2011). However, as Choy (2002) and Ross-Gordon (2011) point out, the term “nontraditional” that has been in circulation since the 1980s is now associated with a list of characteristics that have come to apply at least in part to 73% of all undergraduates (Choy, 2002, p.1). Despite these massive demographic shifts, the term still “suggests that business as usual might not work in serving this large cohort” (Pelletier, 2010, p. 1). Similarly, its persistent assignment to adult undergraduates has been characterized as a punitive, othering measure (Sissel et al., 2001).

One interesting variation, “post-traditional,” was recently advanced by Soares (2013). While the “post-” framework can carry with it power to serve hegemonic, neoliberal interest by un-naming and thereby eradicating evidence of persistent social conditions and disparities, like racism (Crenshaw, 1997; Goldberg, 1993), Soares’s (2013) usage might also suggest one entry point to expanding the discourses and paradigms in which adult undergraduates have been fixed too long.

Learning Practices

In seeking to explore the acts and processes by which adult undergraduates learn in and about higher education, this study draws primarily on sociocultural frameworks. Packer and Goioechea (2000) offer a useful approach to thinking about the constitutive and situated elements of learning:

What constructivists call learning is only a part of a larger process of human change and transformation, the process called learning by socioculturalists. Whether one attaches the label ‘learning’ to the part or the whole, acquiring knowledge and expertise always entails participation in relationship and community and transformation both of the person and of the social world. (p. 238)

However, the insufficiency of a single definition of learning practices to encapsulate these conceptual, theoretical, and methodological considerations must also be acknowledged. Thus this study also draws on literacy frameworks, particularly Street’s (1985) advancement of an ideological model in which literacy is conceptualized as a set of practices, versus autonomous skills, that are contextually grounded and “inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society” (p. 433).

Narrative language. Of note is this study’s narrative employment of capitalization for the term “Black” and lower-case format for the term “white.” This decision draws on McIntyre’s (2007) argument for this formatting as a way of working against entrenched social myths of equal footing or representation between Black and white people in the U.S. This choice also seeks to interrupt the perception that white and Black are terms denoting opposite representations, which again suggests equitable positioning. Instead, I join McIntyre and Harris (1993) in acknowledging that “‘White’ has incorporated Black subordination...’Black’ is naming that is part of the counter-hegemonic practice” (p. 710, in McIntyre, 2007, p. xiii).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the learning practices and experiences of adult undergraduates pursuing baccalaureate degrees in adult learning-focused institutions. These institutions represent a uniquely rich yet poorly understood microcosm for the exploration of adult undergraduate learning practices and contexts. Of particular interest is how the increasing numbers of adult undergraduates nationwide, in tandem with adult-serving institutions responsive

to this growth, are challenging and reframing what is understood as “traditional”—and successful—in terms of choosing, navigating, and learning in college.

This exploratory, descriptive qualitative study involved interviews with a total of 13 adult undergraduate participants across two Midwestern adult learning-focused institutions. Supplementary interviews were conducted with practitioners at both study sites. A phenomenographically-influenced research design (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Pong, 2005), drawing conceptually on an achievement-based model for student practices (Harper, 2007), was chosen for its potential to foster emically-driven student accounts of how they go about, experience, and think about learning in college (Creswell, 2007). This dual emphasis on learning practices and experiences was designed to address limitations in higher education literature and research methodologies concerning college-going adults, toward elucidating ways in which higher education researchers and practitioners can better understand and support adult undergraduate learning.

Two interrelated categories of research questions were pursued. The first category comprises two research questions concerning adult undergraduates’ learning acts, processes, and experiences. The second category comprises the final research question and concerns the unique affordances of adult-focused college environments on student learning and experience, and the interplay thereof.

Research Questions

- 1) How do adult undergraduates pursuing baccalaureate degrees take up the acts and processes of becoming a student in adult learning-focused institutions?
 - a. How do they make choices about enrolling in, navigating, and completing a college degree?

- b. How do they approach academic courses, assignments, and related tasks and activities?
 - c. What influences their learning?
- 2) How do adult undergraduates conceptualize themselves as learners?
- 3) How do adult undergraduates perceive and experience the adult learning-focused contexts of their institution?

Significance

This study addresses current gaps in higher education literature with regard to adult undergraduate learning practices situated within adult learning-focused institutions. It has three main goals:

- 1) To examine the acts and processes through which adult undergraduates learn and acculturate in higher education;
- 2) To raise questions about how adult undergraduates conceptualize, prioritize, and mediate their learning across multiple sociocultural and economic contexts;
- 3) To elicit directions for more responsively aligning adult learning-focused institutions' instruction, resources, and culture with their adult undergraduate population's articulated learning practices, priorities, identities, and values.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to understand the learning practices and perspectives of adults pursuing baccalaureate degrees specifically within adult learning-focused institutions. Accordingly, this literature review situates questions about adult undergraduate learning in the broader context of theories and constructions of adult learning, with attention to the sociocultural dimensions of how both are understood in and across school and society. Thus three domains of literature are presented as a contextual foundation for this necessarily intersectional study.

Adult Learning in Context

The extant research on adult learning is largely concentrated in the domain of adult education scholarship (Donaldson & Rentfro, 2006). Distance remains between the discourse and methodologies established in this scholarship and that of higher education (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Donaldson & Rentfro, 2006; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Ross-Gordon, 2011). As a result, gaps persist in research and models of adult learning situated specifically in adult learning-focused institutions and in adult baccalaureate programs offered by research universities and regional comprehensive institutions.

As Tusting and Barton (2003) suggest in their own literature review of adult learning, research going forward must be more intersectional in nature, taking into account the complex aspects of adult learner lives, choices, and practices. Further, future research must also take institutional context into account. Brookfield and Holst (2011) advance an explicitly critical framework for teaching adult learners that “radicalizes” engagement with the political and sociocultural contexts in which adult teaching and learning are situated. Adult learning-focused institutions join community colleges in offering specifically adult learning-engaged instruction, resources, and programs, with emphasis on under-represented and under-served adult student

populations (Arum & Roska, 2011; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Green, 2006). However, while important community college-focused research has continued to grow (Handel, & Williams, 2012; Mullin et al., 2012; Park & Pascarella, 2007), limited empirical models exist for similarly expanding critically-oriented qualitative research on adults pursuing baccalaureate degrees in adult-focused colleges and universities (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Donaldson & Rentfro, 2006; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Theories and Constructions of Adult Learning

Relatively speaking, higher education has come late to prioritizing adult learning in research and practice (Schlossberg et al., 1989; Tweedell, 2000). Fields such as adult education, professional education, and human resource development have drawn longer and more consistently on the adult-specific learning theories emerging since the 70s, when systematic inquiry into adult-specific learning processes first extended the early twentieth century's psychology-grounded frameworks for understanding general cognitive and behavioral processes (Knowles et al, 1998; Merriam, 1993, 2001; Scenters, 1998). Contemporary operational definitions of adult learning center around both the conditions and processes through which adults acquire, reflect on, and gain proficiency in new types and modes of information, knowledge, and skills (Dunst & Trivette, 2012; Kolb, 1984; Merriam, 2001; Schon, 1990).

Merriam and Caffarella's comprehensive editions of *Learning in Adulthood* (1991, 1999) charts this history and, over the course of two editions, marks a major contribution to the understanding of adult learning contexts and theories in conversation with postsecondary teaching and learning issues. It is particularly attentive to the social contexts, research methodologies, and theoretical frameworks through which adult learning has come to be understood, with focus on how adult learning research's graduate shift from description to theory-building has increasingly engaged critical issues of power, identity, and discourse.

Multiple frameworks exist for categorizing and defining the landscape of general learning theories (Heimstra, 1993; Charters & Hilton, 1989; Hergenhahn, 1988; Swanson & Holton, 2001), with Merriam and Caffarella's (1991) generally accepted as both broad and inclusive (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). They identify five core theoretical domains or orientations—cognitivist, behaviorist, humanist, social learning/cognitive, and constructivist—and six aspects via which they are parsed, including key theorists, view of the learning process, locus of learning, purpose of education, teacher's role, and manifestation in adult learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 264, Table 11.1). The picture of adult-specific learning frameworks that emerges across these domains is a complex one, ranging from narrow threads like McClusky's theory of margin (1963, 1970, 1971) to broad domains like self-directed learning (Houle, 1961; Tough 1967, 1970). Relatively consistent across the research stemming from these domains is focus on individual learner knowledge acquisition and the modes of learning and teaching that support it (Dunst & Trivette, 2012; Knowles et al, 2001; Smith and Gillespie, 2007). Much more recent expansion of theories and conversations have proliferated across these five domains, including the sociocritically-oriented theories not specific to adult education (Merriam, 2001).

The two most influential constellations of adult learning theory-building that emerged are andragogy, advanced by Malcom Knowles (1968, 1984), which was followed two decades later by Jack Mezirow's transformative learning framework (1978, 1981, 1991). Based on Kapp's original terminology, Knowles popularized andragogy as a "new technology" and framework for defining, understanding, and supporting adult learning as distinct from the prevailing child-focused pedagogy paradigm (Baumgartner, 2003; Knowles, 1968, 1980; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). This attention to the nature of adult learning characteristics, dispositions, and conditions, and the interactions thereof, represented a major shift in the orientation of education research and practice (Cranton, 2000; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Closer

attention to the collaborative and transactional dynamics of instructional and learning modalities emerged, with learner control and change anchoring the paradigm (Blackwood & White, 1991; Galbraith, 1991; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Transformative learning draws on critical theory to highlight the ideological and emancipatory dimensions of adult learning, with particular attention to the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). This shift is characterized by Brookfield (2001) as lending theoretical depth to adult learning research and practice in ways that challenged and ultimately overtook andragogy as a dominant paradigm (p. 7). Merriam and Caffarella (1999) also address the critical arc of adult learning theory development toward increasingly situated theories of both learner and learning. Beginning their survey with Knowles's highly individual-focused theory of andragogy, they conclude with three applied frameworks that situate the processes of and conditions for adult learning across intersectional sociocultural contexts: feminist pedagogy, critical theory, and postmodernism. In doing so, however, they note that the sociocultural perspectives at play in the evolution of adult-specific learning theories, while continuing to gain traction, are underrepresented across both adult learning literature and educative practice.

This limitation affects multiple strands of research important to higher education contexts, including ways in which individual and organizational learning, and the relationship thereof, has come to be understood, facilitated, and mediated (Alfred, 2002; Galucci, 2007; Jarvis, 1987). More foundationally, St. Clair (2002) suggests that andragogy in particular has not elucidated “how and why people learn” (p.2). Further, Brookfield suggests that adult learning theory-building has dichotomized more than it has engaged domains such as emotion and cognition, and that the basic delineation of learning within adult learning theory writ large remains murky (1986, 1995).

Subsequent literature on adult learning theory has expanded in multiple theoretical directions from the roughly twenty-year span in which andragogy and transformative learning initially came to anchor, unsettle, and reframe adult learning research and practice. Wilson and Hays observe that “[I]f the 1960s through the 1980s might be termed the age of andragogy, then from the 1980s on we might term this the age of critique” (p. 5). Yet as Collard and Law point out, the theoretical footing for and trajectory of that critique are less clear (1989, 1991). In challenging the relatively “atheoretical” progression of adult learning research, Mezirow seems “unsure about where to locate his emancipatory theory,” particularly with regard to the interplay of structural inequalities, collective social action, and educative processes (Collard & Law, 1991 p. 105). This theoretical dilution contrasts with the way transformative learning and conscientization have taken shape in Freireian, feminist, ecological, and other critically-oriented research contexts (Bowers, 2005; Collard & Law, 1991; Morrow & Torres, 2002),

More generally, both andragogy and transformative learning have been criticized for premature claims of comprehensive theory-building. Common critiques center around their respective weaknesses of methodological testability and generalization as well as empirical data generation (Bowers, 2005; Collard & Law, 1989; Hartree, 1985; Merriam, 2007; Taylor & Cranton, 2013; Taylor & Kroth, 2009). More deeply embedded theoretical tensions have also been identified within each. Taylor and Kroth (2009) recall Heller’s (2004) characterization of andragogy as caught in an empirical “Catch 22” due to its opposition to conventional achievement measures, observing that it “places researchers in a quagmire because the only way to produce evidence of andragogy’s legitimacy is by measuring it” (p. 8). Analyses of transformative learning that affirm its ongoing research relevance, such as Snyder’s (2008), still emphasize the “moving target” nature of the framework, which has yielded a persistent lack of conceptual and methodological precision and consequently meager data on how transformative

learning takes place in structured education contexts (p. 159). More fundamentally, its place alongside other critical theories of education and praxis have been challenged due to a perceived lack of “the socio-political critique that lies at the heart of that tradition,” ultimately “suppress[ing] the concept of a radical praxis such as that advanced by Freire and other proponents of transformative education” (Brookfield, 2004, p. 105-106).

Cranton and Taylor (2012) summarize the cumulative effect that such limitations have solidified around current research approaches to adult learning as having become “redundant, with a strong deterministic emphasis of capturing transformative learning experiences and replicating transformative learning in various settings, while overlooking the need for more in-depth theoretical analysis” (p. 12). Similar critiques have been applied to andragogically-oriented research (Merriam, 2001; Rachal, 2002). This relative stasis both reflects and perpetuates higher education’s limited engagement with adult undergraduates’ increasing presence and impacts throughout all dimensions and types of postsecondary institution (Bash, 2003; Cross, 1981; Deshler & Grudens-Schuck, 2000; Merriam, 1997; Sissel et al, 1997, 2003).

Adult learners “at risk” in higher education. So striking is higher education’s historical lack of systematic engagement with adult learners across institutional, state, and federal levels that “the simple act of questioning becomes a political act that exposes the structured invisibility of adults” (Sissel et al, 2003, p. 23). Yet even in the context of this relative vacuum of research on adults in higher education, surprisingly few studies attend to adult learning in specific adult learning-focused four-year institutional contexts. One of the prevailing paradigms threaded through the limited attention to these institutions is that they are significantly lower in quality as well as tier, and/or outright “alternative” to rather than part of the landscape of four-year degree granting institutions (Arum & Roksa, 2011; CAEL, 2005, 2010; Flint & Frey, 2003). Such perspectives seat them awkwardly not only in relation to traditional baccalaureate institutions, but

also within the widening range of conversations around community colleges.

One troubling consequence is the silent but pervasive architecture of risk that, long instantiated across K-12 education, has also come to frame adult learners in higher education (Bartolome & Trueba, 2000; Gadsden et al, 2009; Gorski, 2010; Hamovitch, 1996; James, 1995; McInerney & Etten, 2002; Quinnan, 1997; Ross, 2003; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995; Valencia, 1997; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). Adult student risk factors are often defined as encompassing “social, psychological, or economic factors to attaining accepting standing in society,” including learning disabilities, mental illness, and poverty; associated outcomes include dropping out (Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Mierzwik, 2013, p. 8). Overwhelmingly, constructions of risk frame social disadvantage and oppression as both endemic and defeating personal attributes (Quinnan, 1997; Vadeboncoeur & Portes 2002). Research focused on adult student under-preparation and challenges, while oriented toward worthwhile discussions of teaching and learning practices, often lend tacit credence to this deficit paradigm by, as Rose (1989) frames it, “divert[ing] attention from the segmented dispensary that lower-division education has become” (p. 202). Yet the response of adult learning theories that affirm resilience, motivation, and self-concept as distinctive educational success factors are caught up in this “at risk” construction as well (Quinnan, 1997; Stephens, 1993).

While such emphasis suggests a locus of resistance and agency for adult undergraduates in marginalizing education contexts, it also shifts both the balance and responsibility of disadvantage from across multi-faceted socio-institutional contexts and histories onto the individual student. Further, as Karol and Ginsburg (1980) identify, such demonstrations of individual adult agency, questioning, resistance, and self-advocacy in these contexts often code as “a potential threat to the authority and autonomy of the academy by virtue of their unwillingness to abide by the status quo (Quinnan, 1997, p. 33).

As addressed in this study's conceptual framework, critical sociocultural and intersectional theoretical models for qualitative research are needed to lend sufficient dimension and trustworthiness to engagement with these issues, dynamics, and implications without reifying static assumptions of difference or of fixed points anchoring learning and development (Alfred, 2002; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1990; McCall, 2005). Central to such an endeavor, and to the specific conceptualization of this study, are frameworks such as Prendergast's (2003) literacy-focused call to "stop confining our critique to 'measuring the distance between marginalized groups...and a powerful norm'" (Guerra, 2003). Brookfield & Holst (2011) advance an exemplary framework of "radicalized adult learning" through which they argue for the reframing of adult learning, instruction, and research as intertwined critical and participatory endeavors that contribute to equity and social justice.

Institutional impacts on Student Learning

A significant body of literature exists on institutional influences on college student learning and development (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Dayton et al., 2004; Erickson, 1968; Evans et al., 1998; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kuh et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sanford, 1966; Watson et al., 2002; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Central to these conversations are questions about institutional responsibility for providing formal academic, social, and even financial resources to align student performance with institutional expectations. Many frameworks for understanding institutionally situated undergraduate learning and development influences have come out of this literature (Evans et al., 1998; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Hurtado et al., 2012; Kasworm, 2010; Kasworm & Pike, 1994; Pascarella, 1985; Rose et al., 2006).

In one of the most influential and widely studied models of influences associated with college learning, institutional characteristics (both structural and organizational) and student academic experiences comprise two of the four key variables (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 256). One common

thematic convergence across the literature is perceived alignment between student and institutional resources. The National Survey of Student Engagement findings from 2007 include emphasis on macro-level institutional support and its facilitation closer collaboration between and across students and faculty. In particular, studies addressing students entering or transferring out of community college emphasize the need for clearer and more responsive pathways to advising relationships and information, as well as closer, more collaborative relationships between and across peers, faculty, and staff (Ross-Gordon, 2011; WestEd, 2012). These findings also suggest that students desire greater alignment with institutional resources, particularly with regard to how academic trajectories are understood and supported.

Complicating this picture is the influence exerted by environments both inside and outside of the institution that must be taken into account in research on learning practices (Evans et al, 1998; Lewin, 1936). Research from across the fields of adult and higher education, with foci ranging from student development to critical literacies, increasingly addresses the embeddedness of out-of-school domains, relationships, histories, literacies, and commitments that help shape how learning is enacted, experienced, and mediated in specific institutional contexts (Alfred, 2002; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kasworm, 2003, 2010 Merriam 1991, 2001; Pascarella, 1985, 2005; Schindley, 2002; Street, 1997, 2004). Of relevance is the critically-oriented body literature on student development, which (1) emphasizes local, multiple, and deeply contextual research and practice approaches; (2) values diversity and positions it as a necessary condition for, not obstacle to, flourishing academic environments; (3) challenges the findings and status of research that has relied on predominantly White and traditional student populations; (4) facilitates a discourse that challenges deficit ideologies and holds institutions accountable for creating equitable conditions, not merely “spaces” or “best practices,” for student flourishing across all domains of their higher education experience; and (5) advocates that institutions must learn from students about how to

equitably and effectively engage them (Hurtado, 1996, 1999; Torres et al., 1998; Harper & Quaye, 2009).

While such research has continued to address issues of diversity and corresponding institutional impacts and responsibilities, fewer studies exist that specifically focus on adult undergraduates, whether in community or traditional college settings (Cook & King, 2005; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Kasworm, 2003, 2010; Kasworm & Pike, 1994; Ross-Gordon, 2003, 2011). Yet persistently absent from these productive, socioculturally-oriented conversations are the specific contexts of adult-focused baccalaureate institutions in which adult undergraduates are the majority, not the exception.

Also under-represented in the dominant scholarship on adult learning and teaching are critical sociocultural and academic literacies frameworks that offer examples of highly intersectional research on adult learner lives, experiences, identities, and practices (Brookfield, 2005; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Haggis, 2003; Tennant, 1997). However, these frameworks shed critical light on under-examined issues such the socio-institutional contexts in which adults navigate higher education choices, expectations, and cultures, as well as the ways in which adult-focused postsecondary settings mutually facilitate and constrain relevant academic advising and support functions and practices.

Higher Education's Changing Pathways and Discourses

While postsecondary education is a regular feature in American political debates, the Obama administration has more consistently addressed postsecondary issues, represented by the 2020 college completion goal, issued in 2001, the architecture of which encompasses actions such as a proposal expanding Pell Grants, the America's College Promise proposal to make two years of community college free, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), and the

American Graduation Initiative (AGI). However, this unprecedented federal attention to access and resource disparities is concurrent with diminished funding in the areas of social policy, adult employment and training policy, and high school and technical education policy, at the same time as increasingly explicit linkages between postsecondary education and employment opportunity (Carnevale, 2010, pp.v-1; Perna 2010, 2016).

Still applicable today is Rose's (1989) encapsulation of how espoused purposes of higher education and associated public discourse bump up against the realities of how higher education is configured within and in relation to increasingly more stratified sociocultural and economic conditions:

...the current public mood is, itself, pretty unforgiving. The level of competition, the state of the economy, the anxiety about social position, the successful shaping of opinion by the political right—all this has contributed to a resolute ideology of individual advancement and a suspicion, at times hostility toward policies that support equity and a common educational good. So we have backlash and lawsuits—framed in a rhetoric of merit and justices—against compensatory efforts and a retreat from the public sphere. No surprise, then, that working-class and, particularly, minority students report the various verbal and symbolic assaults on their presence in privileged educational settings, what educational research Patricia McDonough calls 'a discourse of 'you don't deserve to be here. (p. 252)

Research and debate have continued to address nature and implications of the relationship between widening postsecondary access and widening social and institutional stratification (Carnevale, 2010; Grubb, 1984; Pascarella et al., 1998; Wellman et al., 2008). Of note is how political discourse around the nature of college-going complicate how institutional type, pathway, and purpose have been historically constructed. As an example, Carnevale (2010) identifies two moments in political speeches that, on the surface, appeared to enlarge definitions of college and college-going, while actually suggesting a more complex blurring or narrowing of expectation.

The first is from Margaret Spellings, then Secretary of Education, whom Carnevale points out “was the first Cabinet officer to make a commitment to universal postsecondary education”

(2010, p.7). She opened her affirmation of postsecondary education's "vital" connection to personal economic stability with "We acknowledge that not everybody has to go to college. But everyone needs postsecondary education" (Carnevale, 2010, p. 7). This is an interesting rhetorical maneuvering, in which the careful formality of the first statement gives way to the second statement's enjoining of everyone in the context of postsecondary education. Those four words, "not everybody has to," would not read much differently if they were slimmed to three – "not everybody can" or "not everybody should," (Carnevale, 2010, p.7).

By way of contrast, President Obama's first speech to a joint session of Congress spoke plainly about an urgent need for postsecondary education: "...in a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite...." (Carnevale, 2010, p.7). Yet following his description of the indeed "historic" investment in the postsecondary education system, the onus as well as the opportunity shifts to the public: "...it is responsibility of every citizen to participate in it [education]. And so tonight, I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be a community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma" (Carnevale, 2010, p. 7).

This is a rally that suggests a raised bar for everyone, as opposed to Spellings's brief but unmistakable four-word lowering. Yet this rhetoric of access, opportunity, and even civic engagement seems to exemplify what Sissel et al. (2001) characterizes as an expression of power that reinterprets the lived experiences of those who are marginalized" (p. 20). The nature of the President's invitation to one more year of higher education, despite being "backed up" by a substantial financial investment, reframes the decision as one of motivation, intrinsic to the individual, rather than as reflective of a complicated nexus of sociocultural and economic factors.

The President's more recent address of these factors involves acknowledgement of the financial access, entry, persistence, and completion obstacles through proposals to make two years of community college free and expand Pell Grants. These are promising interventions in the discourse of higher education policy and research, outside of their more questionable prospects for implementation (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013; Finney & Perna, 2014; Perna, 2016). However, as Rose (2016) cautions about the data informing these proposed corrections, "aggregated rates of completion of degrees and rates of transfer don't reflect the multiple reasons people go to a community college—and why they leave." The current administration's more explicit and more sustained attention to higher education might, despite the embedded messages to and about adult learners, represent a long-overdue public overture to render some of these thorny issues transparent en route to transforming public policy and discourse. Perhaps the tenor of this new conversation could signal an opportunity for "developing new understandings of adult life, adult work, and the adult place in civic responsibility and aligning that valued role with adults' role as learners in higher education" (Sissel et al., 2001, p. 25).

The way in which that civic responsibility and value remains constructed, however, poses a challenge. Having already shifted culpability for individual and collective low rates of college-going in the first excerpted part of his speech, President Obama again recast the roles of the individual and the country: "And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country—and this country needs and values the talents of every American." (Carnevale, 2010, p.7). Rose (2016) also explains the risks and implications for students as well as policy makers of "broadcasting dire statistics about failures in our education system [which] can, over time, breed a sense of hopelessness among the public and among policy makers—and that the withdrawal of funding may follow." This is a complex confounding of what Sissel et al. (2001) characterize as a construction of adult students'

academic marginality: “Their environment of valuing family, work, and engagement in the community is not central to the collegiate relationship of students and of most higher education” (p. 25). Having been cast “on the borderlands” of academe for taking part in civic life, adult students are, despite the correctives proposed by the Obama administration, still put in the position of being asked to prove both civic commitment and academic worth through historically locked doors (Sissel et al., 2001, p. 25).

Conclusion

In acknowledgement of these many interlacing factors, this study’s data analysis is facilitated in conversation across multiple domains of literature, to inform a more nuanced, multi-dimensional inquiry into adult undergraduates’ conceptualizations of their learning practices, perspectives, and experiences within the distinctive context of adult-learning focused institutions. In so doing, it will employ the phenomenographically-influenced qualitative research design presented next.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This exploratory qualitative study drew on a phenomenographic research design to facilitate semi-structured interviews with 14 adult undergraduate participants about the learning processes, choices, and experiences through which they pursue baccalaureate degrees in the specific context of an adult learning-focused institution. The following chapter encompasses this study's conceptual, analytical, and methodological frameworks and procedures.

Frameworks

In considering this study's goals and commitments, I am mindful of Nagel's (1998) characterization of research as "an awesome task," with which we must "proceed with a gentleness born from knowing that the subject and the author share the frailties of human mortality" (p. 115). While an overarching phenomenographic research design guides this study, emergent design was also employed to refine recruitment and protocol approaches in response to variations in targeting population sampling and availability as well as the researcher's outsider positionality, in order to ensure a mutually flexible, systematic approach to incorporating new ideas and information in ways that serve the representation and integrity of all participants (Creswell, 2002, 2007; Feinberg & Soltis, 2004). Taking seriously the responsibilities as well as the affordances of a reflexive, shared system of meaning, this study was conducted in conversation with literature and with its chair, faculty and peer debriefers, and participants, with a goal of remaining attentive to the slippages between what is etically framed and emically articulated across relational and narrative spaces (Creswell, 2007; Sullivan, 2012).

Conceptual Framework

This study seeks to join and amplify existing conversations that challenge deficit assumptions about adult undergraduates, as well as about learning practices and engagement that

may or may not employ formal institutional support resources and may thus be overlooked in terms of agency, reflection, and contribution to their learning communities (Biesta, 2008; Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Christ, 1997; Green, 2004, 2006; Guiffida, 2006; Harper et al., 2009; Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem, 2000; Schon, 1983; Stage & Manning, 1992). In doing so, it employs a phenomenographically-influenced, interview-based qualitative design, which focuses on student perspectives on learning and is oriented toward “describing more clearly how learning takes place in higher education.” (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984, p.1) While its facilitation included multiple institutional stakeholders as a way of generating additional perspectives on participants’ learning contexts, in alignment with Marton, Hounsell, and Entwistle’s (1984) attention to instructional and evaluative factors, this study is explicitly focused on students as powerful agents and narrators of their learning, as well as active contributors to the learning culture of their adult-focused institutions (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

Particularly important to this study’s conceptualization and design are considerations of positionality, criticality, intersectionality, and reciprocity. Underpinning these considerations is commitment to an anti-deficit achievement perspective (Harper, 2007, 2009, 2010) in relation to the insufficiently studied population of adult undergraduates pursuing baccalaureate degrees in adult learning-focused colleges and universities. It is hoped that this study will ultimately contribute to ongoing inquiry into, descriptions and examination of, and reframing of adult college-going experiences, processes, and identities—enlarging what and whom we mean when we talk about college—with implications for teaching, researching, and supporting adult undergraduates and the institutions in which they comprise the majority. In so doing, this study also seeks to contribute more broadly to higher education research by putting multiple dimensions of adult student learning and identities in conversation with the broader sociocultural discourse around adult learning and college-going in the U.S.

Positionality. As Richardson (1997) reminds us, writing about research is “a site of moral responsibility” (p. 58). Critical to the undertaking of this study is alertness, reflexivity, and transparency regarding ways in which I may be complicit in deficitizing adult undergraduates across the scope of my research, writing, and/or practice. In doing so, I acknowledge that when I talk in and about higher education, I am also inextricably talking about myself and my complicities (Richardson, 2001). At the same time, attention must be paid to what Weick (2002) characterizes as the “distinct danger” of reflexivity, noting that “in the name of reflexivity, many of us tend to be more interested in our own practices than in those of anybody else.” (p. 898)

Criticality. This study aligns itself conceptually and methodologically with notions of criticality drawn from across multiple domains of theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002; Kincheloe et al., 2011). The central critical positioning of this study may be described as its stance toward the presumed neutrality of academic contexts for research and practice (Kincheloe et al., 2011). It seeks to actively engage and challenge the power imbalances that are inextricably woven across the cultural, institutional, and systemic dimensions of higher education. One extension of this critical stance is this study’s positioning of adult undergraduates as active participants and contributors within their institutional learning culture, drawing on learning identities and lives constructed and experienced both inside and outside of school (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Guiffreda, 2004, 2006; Maxwell, 20005). Aligned here is Brookfield’s (2005) assertion of a critical paradigm for participating in, supporting, and reframing adult education as both reflection of and stake in a collective, democratic, inherently political endeavor.

Intersectionality. What emerges from the preceding discussions is an increasingly complex picture of the multiplicity of historical, topical, and institutional considerations that must be taken into account in this proposed study. In particular, this study’s ongoing analytical process has

surfaced diverse, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory themes, topics, contexts, and literature that cut across individual, institutional, and social domains and discourses. It also positions itself in conversation with Donaldson and Townsend's (2007) express call for multiple lenses as central to looking across and valuing adult students' identities, differences, and contributions. A sufficiently complex and socioculturally-nuanced framework for making sense through, rather than despite, these intersections is necessary. This study's conceptualization and design thus draw on a paradigm of intersectionality, as advanced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1990) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990).

McCall (2005) offers a valuable articulation not only of the challenges embedded in conceptualizing the intersectional domains of study topic, participant, and goals, but also in matching research methodologies that adequately reflect and engage intersectionality theory's underlying epistemological concerns with how experiences and systems of oppression are intertwined in and through their social constructions. Her description of an "intracategorical complexity," which "acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point in time, though it also maintains a critical stance toward categories," seems particularly well suited to exploring the dimensions and interplay of underrepresented student identities, practices, and purposes, as well as the processes through which they are mediated and (re)constructed across the domains of institutional structure and culture (2005, p. 1774).

Reciprocity and transparency. Marshall and Rossman (2011) discuss the embedded dimension of reciprocity as part of the enterprise of qualitative research. Their description of the ways in which researchers intrude on participant lives, priorities, and schedules resonates strongly with my experience conducting this study. The students who participated in this study generously extended their time and insight amidst already over-extended schedules, in and out of class,

engaging me in person as well as via phone, email, and video. They welcomed me into their classrooms and their places of work. Many expressed their desire to support me as a student as one motivating factor in their participation. I was also welcomed by practitioners who facilitated my introductions to their sites and students, as well as those who participated in supplementary interviews.

While it was my privilege to offer the kind of small tokens described by Marshall and Rossman (2011), like helping set up and disseminate class materials, bringing snacks to class, taking charge of the advising office candy bowl, bringing coffee and tea to interviews and meetings, and offering other such tokens of appreciation to my campus hosts, a commitment to more meaningful reciprocity continues to inform my work and my relationship to this study's participants and sites. Informal campus visits, along with sharing literature and ideas with practitioners working on their own dissertations and conducting member checks with all participants, all fostered deeper discussion, and were all engaged in the spirit of such reciprocity. At the same time, I am conscious of the fact that these connections also enriched me and served validity purposes in this study.

Prioritizing transparency in all aspects of communication, campus engagement, and interview facilitation has been especially important. It has been oriented toward making explicit the conditions and features of my study and offering participants every opportunity to make informed, supported decisions about how they wanted to engage and participate, on their terms (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). It has also been offered in acknowledgement of the vulnerability that participants extend in the process of consenting to and participating in interviews. I also sought to render the characteristics, processes, goals, and subsequent purposes of the study as transparent as possible, striving to offer advanced notice and context for interviews that could inform participant agency and decision-making about and as part of this study.

Mission University leadership required my presentation of study themes upon graduation as a condition of my IRB approval. I consider this opportunity to present to be a privilege to be shared with a stance of responsibility to the institution, beyond the bounds of this requirement. It should be noted that my primary contact at Mission's local campus, who facilitated my entry and sponsored my IRB application, plans for it to be conducted as part of a celebratory lunch rather than simply a mandated report. This is another illustration of the goodwill that has accompanied every step of this study. It is my hope that contributing this study's findings to the campus community can involve and benefit students as well as practitioners, and that ongoing relationships can be maintained as they see fit, in a spirit of service to the community and its members.

Listening. This study's interview format both draws on and highlights the role that close listening plays in qualitative research. The narratives that students shared, in all their generosity, interest, depth, and complexity, require—and deserve—equally deep listening. In describing how she learned to listen as central to her performance and writing, Anna Deavere Smith (2001) recalls a shift in her years-long incorporation of interviews, when her listening became more important than her questions: “After I asked the questions, I would listen like I had never listened before for people to begin to sing to me” (in Popova, 2010, para. 5). She also reminds us that neither speaking nor listening are neutral endeavors; especially for participants in an interview, “Speaking calls for risk, speaking calls for a sense of what one has to lose. Not just what one has to gain” (in Popova, 2010, para. 20). It is my hope to do justice to the narratives that participants shared, recognizing the risks they undertook in supporting this study and in support of what I, as a peer student, would gain from it. My recognition and responsibility did not end with this study's interview phase, however, nor will it end with this first iteration of reporting. An ongoing, reflexive stance of respect, vigilance, sensitivity, and humility is required.

Narrative humility. Resonant with Deavere Smith's (2001) conceptualization of listening is a framework that DasGupta (2008) describes as "narrative humility." Speaking from the vantage point of a medical clinician, DasGupta acknowledges the complex interplay of culture, power, expertise, and meaning-making that informs patient and clinician interactions, and calls for clinicians to honor patients' ownership of their stories. Narrative humility is also posited as an alternative to notions of cultural competence, resisting the latter's goal of sociocultural authority and instead taking up a lifelong stance of cultural listening, exchange, receptivity, self-evaluation, and reflection. Ultimately, narrative humility suggests a profound redefinition of clinical positionality, in which the physician's role in service to patients both allows for and is deepened by a "receptivity, where she does not merely act upon others, but is in turn acted upon" (DasGupta, para. 9). While there is an extensive body of critical and sociocultural frameworks for qualitative research that speak to this very dynamic, there is something striking about the conceptualization of humility as located in explicitly relational and embodied contexts that are marked by equally explicit power dynamics. This is a powerful lesson for educational practice and research as well. As DasGupta affirms, "[A]ssuming that our reading of any patient's story is the definitive interpretation of that story is to risk closing ourselves off to its most valuable nuances and particularities" (2008, para. 6).

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on sociocultural learning and literacies frameworks in its design, geared toward examining adult undergraduate learning practices as reflective of and constructed across the complex intersections of identities, experiences, and perspectives. They also offer guidance for mediating the conceptual and practical perspectives on learning in higher education.

Critical sociocultural learning and literacies frameworks. Alfred (2002) affirms the importance of sociocultural frameworks for challenging the limitations of existing adult learning

research and practice, especially the dominance of individual and operational perspectives that minimize or ignore sociocultural contexts. She affirms a plural conceptualization of culture, drawing on Trice and Beyer (1993), understood “discursively as an open text,” revealing complex “system[s] of meaning” (Alfred, 2002, p. 7). She also highlights the importance of addressing power dynamics, and the imbalances thereof, that mark adult education contexts, and of viewing “discourse as a fluid, discursive space that can be changed and negotiated” (Alfred, 2002, p. 11). Embedded in these considerations is attention to the spaces and domains of the personal and social, and the ways in which they are mediated (Alfred, 2002b). She thus posits the “promise” of sociocultural conceptualizations of learning and identity for democratizing adult education learning, research, and instruction alike.

In acknowledgement, this study’s design is informed by these conceptualizations of culture, power, and discourse, as well as by Biesta and Tedder’s (2007) framing of life narratives as both reflection of and contribution to learning. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) offer a useful framing of learning “repertoire” within a cultural-historical framework. Also of influence is Schön’s reflective model of learning (1983, 1987). Ferry and Ross-Gordon (1998) add a generative perspective on experience in relation to Schön’s epistemology of practice, suggesting the need for attention to how individuals use experience to facilitate reflection.

Two intersecting strands of critically-oriented literacy theory also inform the framing of this study. The social construction of literacy practices and identities cannot be disaggregated from socio-economic, political, and educational systems that do not confer “equal access to symbolic or economic capital” (Janks, 2010, p. 209; Heller, 2000; Maybin, 2008). Critical literacy studies offer a framework for engaging these important questions of identity and power in relationship to the multiplicities and intersections literacies and learning (Bartlett, 2007; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1997). It addresses the exposure of, resistance to, and reshaping of

hegemonic ideologies of power that permeate how school, broadly stated, and its resources are structured and enacted (Collins, 1995; Street, 1997; Trent, Artiles & Englert, 1998; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2000; Cook-Gumperz, 2006). With regard to the specific focus of this study, it suggests a relevant lens for mediating the cognitive and psychosocial compartments through which education research often parcels college learning acts and processes. Especially relevant is the academic literacies model, which, broadly defined, resists and interrogates the ways in which power circulates in academic contexts, access and marginality are constructed, and discourses of need and deficit are embedded in pedagogical practices and spaces (Lea, 2004; Lea & Street, 1998, 1999, 2006).

New Literacy Studies offers additional frameworks for considering the notion of practices and the associated mediation of identities, contexts, and worlds (Barton et al., 2000; Street, 1993, 2005). However, Hagood (2002) and others point out critical literacy's often insufficient engagement with racial and gendered privilege, particularly its tendency to sublimate intersectional dimensions of identity and agency within an "either/or" construction (p. 247; Weiler, 2001). Intersectional feminist scholarship's interruption of that dichotomy offers a necessary corrective. Of importance is Lewis, Enciso, and Moje's (2007) characterization of agency as "the strategic making and remaking of selves within structures of power" (p. 4). Bartlett (2007) offers an aligned notion of learning positionalities and practice as "doing" as opposed to being or receiving. Also of relevance is Brandt and Clinton (2002) conceptualization of "'transcontextual' transfer across reading and writing, knowledge, sense of self, and expectation between contexts" (p. 53).

Adult college-going practices, experiences, and "studentness." Finally, Donaldson and Graham's (1999) model of adult undergraduate outcomes maintains the methodological and theoretical centrality of adult undergraduates, upon which this study draws. Specifically, it

considers relationships and influences across the following six domains of adult undergraduate experience:

(a) prior experiences; (b) orienting frameworks such as motivation, self-confidence, and value system; (c) adult's cognition or the declarative, procedural, and self-regulating knowledge structures and processes; (d) the "connecting classroom" as the central avenue for social engagement and for negotiating meaning for learning; (e) the life-world environment and the concurrent work, family, and community settings; and (f) the different types and levels of learning outcomes experienced by adults." (Donaldson & Graham, 1999, Abstract)

In so doing, it offers a corrective to dominant models of adult student practices, identities, and perspectives based on traditional age populations.

Advancing this focus are Brookfield and Holst (2011), who describe as a "radicalized" conceptualization and examination of adult learning. They emphasize the political dimensions of critical thinking in adult education, as well as the pathways it offers adults for their own conceptualization of and action toward a more equitable, democratic society. Aligned with this vision is Donaldson and Townsend's (2007) take on how such research might look as configured for adult undergraduates in adult learning-focused institutions:

...research needs to develop new models that incorporate an understanding of adult students' contributions to higher education institutions and illustrates the benefits that institutions accrue by having adult students participate in their programs. Questions could focus on what binds students together, regardless of age; how students with varying characteristics, including that of age, relate to and complement each other; and what their interplay is within broader contexts. Difference would be seen as richness, and multiple lenses would be used to capture the complexity of college studentness. (p. 46)

In conversation with these frameworks, this study has sought to engage an emically shaped spectrum of "studentness" via semi-structured, phenomenographically-influenced interviews that emphasize participant experience and self-definition as critical to the both the construction and understanding of learning practices (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton, Hounsell, and Entwistle, 1984). Emerging from these conversations are intersectional constellations of participant thoughts

and perspectives, flowing across and redefining multiple domains of identities, choices, attitudes, and experiences, both inside and outside their adult learning-focused postsecondary institutions.

Design Framework

This study design draws from phenomenography to examine and put into conversation the characteristics and variance of adult learning, with emphasis on how participants perceive and experience learning within adult learning-specific institutions (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Pong, 2005).

Phenomenography was selected for two reasons: its focus on learning as informed by and processed through experience, and its methodological orientation toward “describing more clearly how learning takes place in higher education and to point out how teaching and assessment affect the quality of learning” (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984, p.1). Further, Tight (2016) addresses phenomenography’s singular status and affordances as a research framework designed expressly by and for higher education researchers. It thus represents the most generative framework this study’s interest in adult learning specifically situated within adult learning-specific institutions. Related to this framework is Bowden and Marton’s (2004) conceptualization of the university of learning, which rejoins “acts and processes of knowing” with “knowledge itself” as a counter to outcomes-based approaches to “improve learning without inquiry into the nature of learning” (Introduction). Drawing across these paradigms and procedures, this study is ultimately designed to be critically oriented toward the specificity of adult student learning acts, processes, perceptions, experiences, and contexts (Creswell, 2007; Harper & Kuh, 2007; Reason & Evans, 2007; Stage, 2007).

Site Selection

State and Regional Selection

This study was conducted at two adult learning-focused institutions within one of the top five largest metropolitan regions in the Midwest. This regional selection is reflective of convenience sampling due to researcher location and accessibility. However, the institutions and individual campus locations chosen to be the primary study sites within this state represent additional significance and relevance to the study (Creswell, 2007).

Institution Selection

Purposeful selection criteria for the two institutions was based on attendance rankings for students over the age of 25 within a single state. Specifically, they represent the highest and second highest percentages of adults over 25 in attendance across non-profit public and private baccalaureate degree-granting institutions throughout their state, with a primary or branch campus located within the study's top 5 Midwestern metropolitan region. Based on the most current available enrollment data through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the larger of the two selected institutions reports 66% enrollment of students at or over 25 as of 2013, and the smaller of the two selected institutions reports 91% enrollment of adults at or over 25 as of 2014 —reflecting a high intensity of selection criteria (Creswell, 2002, 2007).

Neither of the two selected institutions were participants in CAEL's Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Initiative Toolkit Activities, as of available 2007 CAEL data. However, one site participated in CAEL's National Adult Learners Satisfaction Priority Report, as of 2013 CAEL data, while the other site participated in CAEL's Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) report and is identified as a partner institution (Klein-Collins, 2010). To offer some brief context, of the four institutions from this study's designated Midwestern state that participated in

the CAEL ALFI Initiative as of 2007, three are private non-profit four-year institutions and one is a public two-year institution (CAEL, 2011, p. 12). Interestingly, however, three of these institutions lack a majority population of adult learners; only one comes close, with 49% of non-residential students over the age of 25 (NCES, 2013). In contrast, both of this study's selected sites enroll the aforementioned majority percentages of adults over 25. These sites thus represent an important extension of CAEL's studies, with potential for valuable exploratory, descriptive, and comparative findings.

Both sites are private, non-profit, religiously-affiliated universities, the latter of which represents an additional unit of analysis that wasn't selected for when choosing sites and will be taken up in the subsequent findings and discussion. The two selected institutions also differ in a few ways suggestive of productive comparison. The larger of the two institutions comprises a main residential campus in this study's target state; three adult-focused, non-residential campuses in the state's two largest cities; and one adult-focused, non-residential campus in a major suburb of the state's largest city. Together they represent 93% full-time attendance (NCES, 2012). The significantly smaller site maintains a main residential campus out of state; one adult-focused, non-residential campus in another nearby state; and one adult-focused, non-residential in a major suburb of the largest city of this study's selected state, with 100% part-time and evening attendance (NCES, 2014).

Student choices from among these closely-located, religiously-affiliated campus locations offered insights regarding how each location is perceived and valued across local and regional contexts, as well as ways in which these institutions interpret and align their resources and practices with the student populations they identify as serving.

Regional campus selection. In order to maximize site selection reliability and replicability, the only in-state branch campus from the smaller of the two sites guided initial purposeful selection. This campus will be referred to hereafter as Mission University.

Once Mission University was selected, convenience selection of the second branch campus, which is an adult-serving campus located within the same general office park area, followed. This second participating campus will hereafter be referred to St. Clare University. Communication with St. Clare's administrative contacts during site recruitment suggested that this campus location enrolled their highest number of in-state adult students, thereby retrospectively confirming the validity and purposefulness of St. Clare's selection.

Both sites' shared location suggests student populations drawn primarily from the same local and regional school systems. However, personal communication with students and administrators at both sites, not all of whom participated formally in this study, indicated that many students commute an hour or more to attend.

IRB Procedures and Schedule

The following schedule illustrates the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures facilitated at the University of Pennsylvania and study sites.

October 2013

The University of Pennsylvania's IRB was approved.

December 2013

St. Clare University accepted the University of Pennsylvania's IRB and approved dissertation data collection.

January 2014

A modified University of Pennsylvania IRB submission, reflective of site-influenced additions to protocol, was approved. Mission University's IRB was approved with contingencies that were

negotiated in collaboration with Mission University's faculty sponsor, researcher, dissertation chair, and the University of Pennsylvania IRB director.

February 2014

Mission University's IRB was approved.

March 2014

A modified University of Pennsylvania IRB submission, reflective of Mission's IRB process, was approved.

September 2015

A University of Pennsylvania IRB continuing review was approved. This extension permitted ongoing recruitment activities toward reaching study design participant targets. As of the original targeted June 2014 end date, 18 out of an eventual total of 48 interviews had been conducted.

Recruitment Procedures and Schedules

The recruitment procedures of study sites and participants was an ongoing process, during which schedules overlapped and procedures reflexively informed each other.

Site Recruitment

Upon confirmation of Penn IRB approval in October 2013, and in ongoing consultation with dissertation chair, researcher emailed previously-researched and -identified executive leadership at the main in-state campuses of both targeted sites. NCES data informed a backup list of three institutions representing the next highest numbers of adults 25 or over pursuing baccalaureate degrees.

During October-November 2-13, an initiation process consisting of initial email contact, phone follow-up, and one additional email contact requesting references to recommended leadership was pursued at both target sites and three backup sites. During this time, local site management and leadership information was also identified, to be pursued if main campus leadership remained unresponsive.

With chair approval, pursuit of local site contact commenced in November 2015, adhering to the aforementioned process. St. Clare University's site manager and lead advisor responded late November, with a first meeting convened in December 2015, during which dissertation data collection was granted. This initial contact remained the primary site contact facilitator throughout the duration of this study. Mission University's campus manager responded in November 2015, with a first meeting convened the same month, during which local dissertation data collection was granted and hosting institution IRB application next steps were discussed. This initial contact remained the primary site contact facilitator throughout the duration of the study.

Practitioner Recruitment

While student participants represent this study's primary unit of analysis, supplementary practitioner interviews served two important purposes: relationship building toward student referrals, introductions, and recruitment; and development of a contextual body of data in which student learning practices, choices, and experiences could be more dimensionally situated.

Thus the sequencing of practitioner data collection at the beginning of the study, particularly contextual informal meetings and formal interviews with practitioners, represent significant opportunities to gain site access through relationships development. More importantly, it permitted practitioners to ask research questions and get to know and introduce researcher on their own terms, as well as within the conventions and expectations of their site's culture, all toward establishing as trustworthy a sample as possible.

At both sites, practitioner recruitment was facilitated via snowball and convenience methods, with primary referrals facilitated through referrals from primary site contacts. Initial contact was facilitated via email, in order to provide the necessary dissertation information and researcher

introduction, and were copied to the referring site contact. Short phone call follow-ups were facilitated within a week of initial contact, often sooner if referring contact indicated preferences for phone. If the practitioners recommended by site contacts did not respond after two weeks dating from initial email contact and one phone or email follow-up, new referrals were requested from site contacts.

At both sites, to augment reach, the researcher also identified faculty members teaching required courses for all students, required courses by major, and capstone courses and facilitated initial email contact, with one phone follow-up as needed. Finally, researcher arrived on campus in advance of scheduled meetings or interviews, with a goal of walking around to classrooms and introducing themselves to faculty members. The primary goal of these impromptu visits was to request faculty consideration of disseminating informational handout to students; this yielded opportunities to discuss the possibility of quick class introductions and faculty member interviews for themselves.

This latter approach, while limited in scope by researcher's restricted access to site spaces and by practitioners' schedules restricting their own ability to arrive with more than a few minutes in advance of class, proved successful at Mission University. There were three faculty members present early in classes; all handed out recruitment materials, requested that I speak for a few minutes to their class, and participated in interviews. This approach was not successful at St. Clare, however, due to lack of faculty availability in advance of class, as well as the four months during which researcher's course observation schedule conflicted with visits to other classrooms.

In general, advance preparation for restricted site access and participant availability also informed research emphasis on multiple methods of recruitment responsive to the higher likelihood of convenience and snowball sampling. Also, due to the restrictive nature of

practitioner availability, the significance of relationships and referrals to practitioner voluntary participation, recruitment became an ongoing process. The final dates at which both sites' practitioner interviews were completed represents the end dates of an ongoing recruitment process.

St. Clare University. Practitioner recruitment began upon site approval of researcher dissertation study and acceptance of Penn IRB in December 2013 and continued throughout December 2015. The first practitioner interview was conducted in March 2014 and the last was conducted in January 2015. Six practitioner participants included and/or came from key site contact referrals.

Mission University. Practitioner recruitment began upon site approval of dissertation study data collection in October 2013, which also entailed confirmation of key site contact as faculty sponsor for hosting institution review of Penn IRB and completion of hosting institution IRB process. The recruitment continued throughout November 2015. The first practitioner interview was conducted in April 2014 and the last was conducted in November 2015. Six practitioner participants included and/or came from key site contact referrals. Fourteen practitioner participants came from a combination of referrals from first phase of practitioner interviews and researcher-identified and –facilitated contact.

Student Recruitment

Student recruitment represented a significant challenge for this study. The combination of small campus population and limited adult student time, especially when taking into account both campuses' evening course format of 3-4 hours, ending between 9-10 pm, required openness to opportunistic and snowball sampling methods in building toward a reliable student sample (Creswell, 2007). This study's sample of 14 students total was determined, for the purposes of this first iteration of reporting and in acknowledgement of limitations, to align with representative

phenomenographic study samples of 15-30 participants with sufficient reliability and trustworthiness (Bowden & Walsh, 2000; Creswell, 2002, 2007; Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984).

At both sites, student recruitment generally involved four methods: (1) site contact dissemination of site-customized informational handouts¹, including full contact information, among enrolled students; (2) researcher introducing self and study during course visits and observations; (3) researcher providing informational handouts during course visits and observations; and (4) research and site contact/s providing print handouts, accompanied by cover notes for faculty members whenever appropriate, in all site classrooms and the limited common areas, at both sites, such as the computing room or small refreshment area with tables and vending machines.

The last method was employed when there was no instructor response regarding class visits or when there were scheduling conflicts with observed classes. Promotional material and methods were designed to facilitate purposeful sampling. However, preparation for restricted site access and participant availability also informed research emphasis on multiple methods of recruitment responsive to the higher likelihood of convenience and snowball sampling.

Due to the highly restrictive nature of student availability and the significance of relationships and referrals to student voluntary participation, recruitment became an ongoing process.

St. Clare University. The student recruitment process was ongoing from January 2014 to January 2015, with handouts and requests for class visits and observations renewed each term. The final student interview was conducted in December 2014. Significant assistance was provided by both site advisors, including the facilitation of information to faculty members about

¹ Included in Appendices

researcher interest in class observations and introductions to faculty members. My primary site contact also facilitated permissions for me to observe two classes, one January-February 2014 and one May-June 2014, which yielded half of St. Clare's 6 total student participants.

Also of significant help was the informal admittance to the site. The primary entry point for the site was the first door upon entering the building, which contained an open cubicle area in which both advisors worked. It functioned as a reception area for students stopping by on their way to class as well for students with both scheduled and unscheduled advising consultations. Informal relationships with both advisors was facilitated quickly, and both extended open welcome to visit them whenever I wanted.

Mission University. The student recruitment process was ongoing from April 2014-January 2014, while also being more intermittent than St. Clare University due the following four factors: (1) lack of assistance with electronic dissemination of informational handouts by site contacts; (2) a more formal, reception area-based admittance to site and accompanying more formal site culture, which limited informal opportunities to visit classrooms and practitioners unless a scheduled meeting permitted reason to be on campus; (3) consequent lack of opportunities to provide handouts to classrooms in which I wasn't able to reach through approved visits; and (4) lack of ongoing class observation opportunities. The final student interview was conducted in November 2014. Opportunities to visit 5 classes and stay to observe 2 class sessions arose later in data collection, June 2014 through November 2014, after being invited during the course of interviewing their respective instructors. Five out of 7 total Mission University student participants resulted from these class visits. Of note, the facilitation of an advisor at this site was of significant help, as it was at St. Clare. The other 2 student participants were walked over to me and introduced by Mission University's advisor, while I was visiting the computing room in advance of a class visit.

A total of 38 participants across both sites were interviewed: 11 from St. Clare University and 27 from Mission University. Fourteen total student participants were interviewed: 6 from St. Clare University and 8 from Mission University.

Data Collection

The source of data for this study comprised one-on-one phenomenographic interviews with participants. Two semi-structured protocols were designed for students, with a goal of interviewing students twice. The first interview protocol focused more on how students approach and take up learning activities, while the second interview protocol revisited those previous areas, with more focus on how students think about learning in general. The interview protocols were expressly designed to build on each other and to be completely combined, as needed, in the event that students were unable to participate in both. Four out of 6 St. Clare University students participated in two interviews, and 5 out of 8 Mission University students participated in two interviews. The shortest student interview was 38 minutes and the longest was 103 minutes.

More structured protocols were designed for practitioners, with a goal of interviewing practitioners once. The interview protocol focused on practitioner philosophies, approaches, and perspectives on student learning and site academic culture. The shortest practitioner interview was 21 minutes and the longest was 114 minutes.

Interview Protocols

Consistent with the goals of phenomenography, in which participant learning and experience are framed as linked and mutually informing, the first student interview protocol covered the following areas: (1) Introduction to student as learner; (2) Discussion of a representative assignment; and (3) Student learning processes, questions, and strengths. The second student interview protocol covered the following areas: (1) Perspectives and influences on

learning; (2) Reflections on site experience and advice for fellow students; (3) Advice for practitioners and site. Both interviews concluded with an invitation for participants to ask the researcher any questions.

The practitioner interview protocols covered the following areas: (1) Practitioner background; (2) Institutional context; (3) Teaching/tutoring/administrative contexts (adapted for each practitioner's role/s; (4) Student contexts; (5) Concluding reflections. As with student interviews, practitioner interviews concluded with an invitation to ask the researcher any questions. (See Appendix A for a copy of final interview protocols.)

Interview settings and procedures. Interviews took place at locations of participant choosing. The primary locations for student interviews was an empty classroom or common area at their local site; other locations included student place of employment, coffee shops, and shopping center food courts. The primary locations for practitioner interviews was their office or an empty classroom at their local site; other locations included coffee shops and shopping center food courts.

All interviews were digitally recorded on two devices, with the goal of generating a backup recording in the event of primary device malfunction. The best quality sound recording was saved and encrypted on the researcher's home computer and the backup recording was deleted. Audio files were transmitted securely to an academic transcription provider as approved by the University of Pennsylvania IRB and, as specified in their confidentiality form, both audio files and electronic transcripts were deleted after secure transmission to the researcher. Thirty-six interviews were transcribed verbatim by the academic transcription provider, and two interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. In compliance with the University of Pennsylvania IRB guidelines, all formats of interview and transcript files will be destroyed.

Supplemental data. While not a source of data collection analyzed for the purpose of this report, course observations at St. Clare University contributed important contextual knowledge about student learning contexts. It also helped foster relationships with students and course instructors. Finally, it contributed to reflexive customization of interview protocols to better reflect the emic language and learning contexts. Observing courses also yielded the highest rate of student participation, with 3 out of 6 total St. Clare University participants resulting from introductions and subsequent relationships developed during classes. Course observations also afforded significant contact with instructors before and after class, of which one relationship was maintained via email correspondence after their class ended. However, both instructors' busy schedules did not permit a formal interview.

Course type and observation format. The first observed course took place January-February 2014. It was required for all new and returning students, and was designed to teach students self-reflective tools for identifying and building on learning styles and collaborative learning approaches within college expectations and assignments. The second observed course took place May-June 2014, was a required course, and was designed to build on the institution's introductory academic writing and research course.

During the first day of each course, the site's lead advisor walked the researcher to the classroom to meet the instructor and any students already in class. Instructors extended a few minutes for the researcher to introduce herself to the class, explain the reason for visiting class and conducting the study, and hand out an "invitation to participate" flyer containing study details and contact information. (See Appendix B for both sites' invitations to participate handouts.)

Both instructors invited the researcher to actively participate in student workshops and activities, which generated significant conversation and helped build relationships. Three out of 6

student participants came from the January-February 2014 observation; 2 additional students came from the May-June 2014 observation; and the sixth student was referred by site advisors.

Field notes. Field notes were taken throughout the duration of all class observations. For formal observations of St. Clare University's introductory academic skills course, a two-column template differentiated observations from etic comments.

For formal observations of St. Clare University's writing course, a more detailed table was created to take notes in the following categories: (1) Time of note; (2) Speaker/s; (3) Instructor action; (4) Part of Class/Event; (5) Topic/focus/opportunities. A key was developed to identify speaker types (T=Teacher; IS=Individual Student; WC=Whole Class), and initials designated which specific participant was speaking. To illustrate, the following table is a representative entry during one class.

Table 1 <i>Course Observation Field Note Excerpt</i>				
6:12	IS-T	“	“	T asked - do you want us to underline whole thesis statement? Is that common in papers? B responds no, but just a tool for you.

The quotation marks indicate continuation of (3) Instructor Action (in this case, flipping through PPT) and (4) Part of Class/Event (in this case, feedback on profile papers). The (2) Speaker/s section identifies conversation at 6:12 pm as being directed by an individual student (IS) to the teacher (T).

For one-time observations of Mission’s courses that didn’t involve full term or full course presence, field notes were jotted more informally in a notebook.

Journal entries and memos. Journal entries were either written or audio recorded as soon as possible after each interview and class observation. They focused on capturing as many details of each data collection encounter as possible, with ongoing attention to connections within and across these encounters as well how researcher positionality, questions, and thoughts emerged from and influenced them. Overall, these journals represent a reflective architecture of observations, experience, and meaning-making throughout the year-long data collection process.

Given the late hour at which many meetings concluded and researcher driving commute, audio recordings were a major method of recording details and reflections. When more than one interview was scheduled for the same day, or when interviews took place the same day as a class observation, a journal entry was written or recorded whenever possible for each individual encounter. However, if time did not permit that, immediate thoughts were quickly jotted and a longer journal entry after the concluding encounter was written or recorded to take account of the day's interactions. Finally, journal entries were also written or recorded after informal interactions with practitioners or faculty on site or at alternate locations such as coffee shops; they were often written or recorded as appropriate in response to personal communication with participants as well.

Descriptive and analytical memos recorded and facilitated the development of this study's conceptual, procedural, and analytical work, often building on details or ideas emerging from the journals. They were used to take apart individual ideas, questions, and challenges, as well as to reduce data, which deepened focus, abstraction, and transformation of information and contributed to thematic and analytical data representation (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data diagrams and visual displays propelled and strengthened analytical processes and validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). They fostered the systematic parsing of data, examination of links between and across data categories, and the analysis of data themes, patterns, and relationships.

Consent process. All participants were extended significant opportunity to meet researcher, ask questions about researcher and study, and discuss how participation might affect established classroom/site dynamics, scheduling, and other related issues.

Once a participant expressed interest in participating via in-person meetings or contacting researcher via the provided phone, text, and email information provided on recruitment handouts

and during in-person introductions, a conversation took place or was scheduled for a subsequent meeting to discuss details. All study participants opted to schedule an interview after initial contact, indicating interest in participating and that questions had been sufficiently answered.

During the process of scheduling and confirming participant meeting schedules, the researcher followed up with each participant via email. They provided an electronic copy of the consent form, reviewed the information previously discussed regarding interview formats and consent form details, and invited the participant to ask any new questions that may come up. It was continuously stressed that the participant could reschedule or drop out at any time, and that participant was welcome to choose an interview format, location, and time that best fit their schedules and preferences. In both recruitment and interview scheduling contexts, the researcher made themselves available every day of the week and during any times available for the participant.

For this and all contact, availability via phone, email, and text was offered, with additional video chat options extended. Both email and phone were the primary methods of participant contact. Two participants texted the researcher for some but not all follow up and scheduling purposes. Two participants elected to interview via video chat formats due to restricted availability and long commutes, but conducted all other communication via in-person, phone, and email formats.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher reviewed each section of the consent form verbally with participants, during which each potential participant were offered another opportunity to ask questions. The participant was also given the option to take the form and review at home before signing and returning it. No participants required the latter option, electing to conduct the interview during that scheduled meeting. Finally, the main interview categories were reviewed with participants before commencing with the first question, with a goal of

facilitating a more transparent exchange and providing participants with more opportunities for control and self-direction as the semi-structured conversation unfolded.

Steps to minimize coercion were embedded in both study and consent form design. No compensation or any other monetary or tangible reward for participating in the study was offered, although for meetings taking place on campus or at participant workplace, researcher brought drinks like coffee based on previously-discussed participant dietary habits and preferences. Recruitment speeches, associated recruitment communication, and informed consent forms made clear that participating in the study would not give participants any advantage in the institution, as well as emphasizing that lack of participation would in no way negatively affect their standing or evaluation in the institution.

Finally, at every point of contact, the researcher affirmed the study's terms of confidentiality and the participant's right to skip a question, stop the audio recorder, end the interview, and withdraw from the study, with absolutely no penalty to their standing or evaluation in the institution. (See Appendix C for copies of both sites' informed consent forms.)

Confidentiality. All relevant institutional, regional, and individual information was de-identified and excluded from reporting, with pseudonyms designated wherever necessary. Identifying information was defined in study design as including previous schools attended; past and current places of employment (including the masking of study site names, as explained in prior sections); neighborhoods, cities, etc. in which participants grew up or currently live; any mentioned friends, family members or colleagues; and any religious institutions or community groups to which student, faculty, and/or staff participants belonged in the past or currently belong.

All study data (field notebooks, audio-recordings, transcripts, and documents) was stored in researcher's home office in compliance with University of Pennsylvania IRB guidelines. Identifiable data, such as participant signed consent forms, were stored in separate locked filing drawers from de-identified data. Digital audio data were stored in encrypted, password-protected files on researcher's home computer hard drive, with a backup physical drive stored in a dedicated locked filed drawer. All formats of data will be erased or shredded at the conclusion of the study in compliance with University of Pennsylvania IRB guidelines

Data Collection Schedule

The table on the following page illustrates this study's inventory of formal data collection encounters, formats, and duration. As discussed in the prior section on recruitment procedures and schedules, the time involved in developing site relationships as well as limited participant availability contributed to an overlapping, iterative recruitment and data collection schedule, with total recruitment activities at both sites spanning December 2013 and through December 2015, and with total data collection activities at both sites spanning January 2014 through January 2015.

Table 2

Inventory of Data Types, Encounter Dates, and Pseudonyms

KEY: A--Alum; C--Class; I - Interview; Fac--Faculty; FS--Faculty/Staff; FI - Follow-up Interview
O--Observation; Sta--Staff; Stu--Student

Color key for highlighted Participant/Observation Setting Category & Site Columns:

C FS Fac Stu Sta A 1 2

Formal Encounter Sequence	Participant or Observation Location	Interview or Observation Designation	Site Affiliation	Interview/ Observation Date	Interview/ Observation Duration	Participant Pseudonym
1	C	O	1	1/28/14	4 hours	Hugh
2	C	O	1	2/11/14	4 hours	Hugh
3	C	O	1	2/18/14	4 hours	Hugh
4	C	O	1	2/25/14	4 hours	Hugh
5	FS	I	1	2/27/14	1 hour 5 min	Zoe
6	Sta	I	1	3/21/14	1 hour 15 min	Hal
	Sta	I	2	4/14/14	15 min	Andrew
7	Sta	I	2	4/21/14	1 hour 10 min	Andrew
8	C	O	1	4/22/14	3 hours	Freda
9	C	O	1	4/29/14	3 hours	Freda
10	C	O	1	5/6/14	3 hours	Freda
11	FS	I	2	5/8/14	55 min	Nancy
12	Stu	I	1	5/13/14	78 min	Yara *
13	FS	I	2	5/13/14	62 min	Irene
14	Stu	I	1	5/15/14	60 min	Elyse*
15	Stu	I	1	5/20/14	78 min	Tony*
16	Sta	I	2	5/20/14	67 min	Violet
17	Fac	I	2	5/31/14	67 min	Edward
18	Fac	I	2	6/2/14	66 min	Olivia
19	C	O	2	6/4/14	3 hours	Edward
20	FS	I	2	6/5/14	92 min	Valerie
21	Sta	I	2	6/9/14	51 min	Naomi
22	Fac	I	2	6/10/14	45 min	Olga
23	Sta	I	2	6/11/14	56 min	Fred
24	Stu	I	2	6/12/14	38 min	Ingrid#
25	A	I	2	6/14/14	50 min	Frank
26	Stu	I	1	7/10/14	100 min	Odette*
27	FS	I	2	7/22/14	55 min	Natalie
28	Stu	FI	1	7/30/14	57 min	Tony
29	Sta	FI	1	8/5/14	61 min	Hal
30	Sta	I	2	8/14/14	81 min	Renata
31	Stu	I	1	8/20/14	47 min	Nina*

Data Analysis

The qualitative data coding and analytical methods employed in this study were designed to engage and put into conversation both social actions and social facts (Erickson, 1997). Accordingly, research approach to these processes was informed by the three dimensions of data analysis outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998):

(a) the data, be they participants' recounting of actual events and actions as they are remembered or texts, observations, videos, and the like gathered by the researcher; and (b) the observers' and actors' interpretations of those events, objects, happenings, and actions. There also is a third element: the interplay that takes place between data and researcher in both gathering and analyzing data... Interplay, by its very nature, means that a researcher is actively reacting to and working with data" (p. 58).

This notion of interplay aligns with Patton's (2002) assertion that researchers are part of the validity construct in qualitative research. In acknowledgement, analytical memos and peer debriefing were designed to take account of all participant, conceptual, and analytical work throughout the duration of the study. They assisted in the reduction and analysis of data while also serving as a form of data themselves (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Generally speaking, stages of coding and analysis generally followed what Miles and Huberman (1994) define as "three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification" (p. 10). Differences between emic and etic language were also attended to throughout all phases of coding analysis, driving the primary coding and analysis phases, as were distinctions between and across frequency and intensity of data incidence (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Attention to the transitions from codes to themes was also important. Saldaña's description of "theming the data" served as a primary guide to navigating the overlaps and

transitions from codes to themes. The transition from initial navigation of unstructured data to the development of codes and themes was further influenced by phenomenography's twofold approach, in which discrete coding coalesces into thematic codes representing a dominant type or domain of meaning, which are further reduced and intensified through analysis of thematic structures, relationship, and variance (Marton & Pong, 2005).

More specifically, Saldaña's (2009, 2013) framework for qualitative coding and analysis guided this study's procedures, particularly its emphasis on early cycles of coding attending to the relationship between specific categories of description and the contexts or dimensions across which they intersect. Assigning and defining descriptive codes requires early attention to context and pattern. This multi-dimensional framework for descriptive coding also aligns with one of the primary analytical modes of this study, dialogic analysis. Further, it provides specific options and steps for identifying specific indicators of both etic and emic roles, perspectives, and interpretations. This specificity suggests rigor and supports contextualized data codes and themes that contribute to this study's analytical validity.

A final supplementary guide for deepening data immersion came from non-grounded theory-specific comparative analysis (CCA) (Fram, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The primary CCA feature upon which this study drew is its call for facilitating progressively more specific coding and comparison between and across categories of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1976). Of note here is Charmaz's (2000) specifically constructionist approach to CCA, enabling "mutual construction of knowledge by the researcher and participant and the ability to develop subjective understandings of participants' meaning" (Fram, 2013, p. 2). However, it is important to note that this study does not otherwise employ or draw on grounded theory methodology or frameworks. Appendix D illustrates this study's five phases of data coding and analysis.

Triangulation/Crystallization

Continuous, reflexive recourse to all literature, data, and participants throughout the analytical process, including peer debriefers, fulfills triangulation criteria for ensuring internal validity (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin, 2010). However, the concept of triangulation and its implication of a fixed point has been critiqued (Denzin, 2010; Richardson, 1994). Richardson (1994) instead posits a crystallization, in which “externalities are reflected and refracted within. What we see depends upon our position and angle of approach” (Reilly, 2013). This study’s emphasis on intersectional theories and methods conceptually aligns with this multifaceted alternative, especially in its emphasis on peer debriefers from both inside and outside study sites, all of which contributed to this study’s reflexive approach to data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Researcher Positionality, Trustworthiness, and Validity

Considerations of researcher positionality—the “human as instrument” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981)—require engagement with notions of fluidity and responsibility alike. Reinharz (1997) reminds us that we both “*bring* the self to the field” and “*create* self in the field (p. 3). These embedded positionalities must be made systematically transparent in order to mitigate the effects of their assumptions, biases, and contexts on research design and data analysis (Harper & Kuh, 2007).

This qualitative study is necessarily informed by the biases I bring to this study (Merriam, 1998). In particular, this study is rooted in my experience as a practitioner in under-resourced, rural adult learning-focused institutions, especially my tutoring roles. It is also inflected by my experience as a first-generation college student from a working-class background. Those intertwined identities, and the ways in which they both function and code,

have been complicated by my doctoral trajectory—namely my positionalities as a white woman with increasing academic literacies and “insider” roles within the field of education and the academy.

Tensions across these roles and identities were at play in the facilitation of this study. They were most prominent in the site recruitment phase, in which my goal as a dissertating student to be permitted site access was tied into which of my signaling identity markers would be considered most persuasive and acceptable to a site and its gatekeepers. Tensions also arose in negotiating how to support but not bias participant interview conversations, especially students’, via both discursive and relational moves. The phenomenologic bracketing process offers a guideline for addressing these biases, but represents limits insofar as it contains the potential for false researcher perceptions of having sufficiently reduced facilitative bias, leading to insufficient account taken thereof in ensuing study processes (Moustakas, 1994).

One final complication of the bracketing process is illustrated by the connections across my background, practitioner experience, and a key conceptual framework for this study, Harper’s (1997) anti-deficit achievement model. My learning identities and development, inside and outside of school, are immeasurably shaped, supported, and expanded by family members who did not attend college. My academic commitments are inspired by my students and colleagues in financially struggling but culturally rich and dynamic adult learning-specific institutions—the great majority of whom are first-generation students thriving amidst often extraordinary financial and personal challenges. Their sophisticated learning practices and the high bars they held for themselves are, however, also situated within social messages suggesting that they may not count as “real” college students, that they’re too old to pursue a degree, or that where they attend doesn’t count as a “real” college. In response to these influences, I purposefully designed and conducted this study with an achievement perspective—a clear bias—as its focal point. My

interview protocols thus privileged questions about student strengths, choices, and experiences, which necessarily inflected my facilitative style and stances within my study sites.

The profound complexities of identity, bias, and reflexivity, and the pervasive way in which they are present throughout all study stages, require systematic attention that avoids “rehearsal[s] of the familiar” (Pillow, 2003, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 280). To that end, analytical and personal memos were composed throughout the study, from the initial planning phases through the year-long data collection period from January 2014—January 2015, and continuing throughout this first iteration of data analysis and reporting, ending April 2016. These memos were oriented toward identifying biases, assumptions, questions, and discomforts, and were discussed with peer debriefers in order to interrupt reflexive insularity. These memos also supported and recorded the trajectories of my meaning-making about the empirical, conceptual, and theoretical domains of this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Trustworthiness was also supported by rigorous immersion in study data and supporting literature; systematic facilitation of well-defined research methods and analysis; and secure data management and confidentiality (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Just as critical to the enterprise of critical qualitative research is consideration of how participants are framed and enjoined. Accordingly, member checks and peer debriefing were incorporated throughout all phases of this study. Personal correspondence and informal meetings with key contacts at both sites were maintained throughout the data collection and analysis phases. In addition to deepening relationships and contributing significantly to the contexts in which I was welcomed and conducted the study, it also allowed for participants to choose levels of involvement, some of whom took up supportive debriefer and thought partner roles, through methods such as ongoing email correspondence and informal meetings over coffee to exchange ideas about respective projects. Finally, the multiple standpoints and perspectives of my peer

debriefers, committee, and participants contributed to greater consistency and richness of coding and analysis within a framework of crystallization (Richardson, 1994).

Analytical validity interview. An additional validity measure of note involved the employment of analytical validity interviews. These interviews drew from Onweugbuzie, Leech, and Collins's (2008) peer interview model, which provides a long list of sample questions about researcher positionality, decisions, encounters, processes, and perceptions, as opposed to a prescriptive protocol. It suggests that multiple questions may be selected as relevant for some purposes, while a single question may also facilitate more focused conversation around a significant encounter, idea, or challenge arising from a study.

One analytical interview was conducted during the data collection phase of this study. The peer debriefer who conducted the interview represents specific interest in analytical validity, experience with dissertation design and facilitation, and areas of focus outside the student populations, contexts, and design of this study. This variation between peer and researcher backgrounds and perspectives was both a conscious choice and affordance of the analytical validity process. It permitted the exchange of multiple perspectives on the role of the researcher; associated ways in which participants and processes were being framed and understood; and how researcher engagement with participants was informing study facilitation and reflection.

The interview was conducted via video chat and audio recorded, with written notes taken. A journal entry was written post-interview, and subsequently individual sections of the recording were transcribed as needed. The overall process contributed to subsequent conversations and memos attentive to the influences, affordances, and limitations of researcher positionality throughout this study.

Ethics

The following issues are of paramount importance to this study: responsiveness to participant schedules and contexts for participation; protection of participant identities and data; and transparency of consent and research processes. Participation was wholly voluntary, and the following participant decisions were fully supported: participating in only one interview instead of the proposed two; shortening time available for interviewing; participating in interviews via video methods; changing their mind about participating after initially volunteering.

At the beginning of the study, detailed consent forms were presented to participants, and researcher extended opportunities to discuss the goals and details of the study across various methods: one-on-one or during class visits on campus; via email; and via phone. These forms included a summary of the study, relevant contact information, and directions for withdrawing from study.

Only de-identified information appears in this written report, and anonymity will be preserved in future iterations of data reporting. Finally, all documentation pertaining to this study have been stored in a specially designated secure location in my home, with the master identified transcripts and consent form stored separately from the de-identifying transcripts.

Limitations

Ten limitations to this study should be noted; others may exist that are not identified here.

1. The complexity of adult undergraduate learning contexts posed significant challenges for this study. The instruments and analytical frameworks employed, however in-depth and comprehensive, may not have sufficiently captured reliable data. As discussed earlier, this study's design drew on phenomenographic methods, in which similar studies

reported student samples ranging on average from 15-30 (Bowden & Walsh, 2000; Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984). This study enrolled a total of 14 student participants across two sites. Thus while the present study sample was determined to adhere with sufficient trustworthiness and reliability to the design and goals of a phenomenographic study, it may not adequately represent the student population at this study's specific institutional sites.

2. More generally, the interviews conducted during this study's year-long data collection phase may not adequately represent the situated learning practices, experiences, and identities of study participants as delimited by this study's research questions. What it does accurately represent it may not be wholly understood or substantiated in this first iteration of reporting.
3. The full, complex nature of participant schedules, compounded by long evening class times and commutes, sometimes contributed to interview rescheduling, limited time to meet for scheduled interviews, and prohibited participation or continuation in this study. Those students and practitioners who did participate may have limited or self-censored their answers, with factors ranging from the effects of fitting interviews within compressed schedules to my positionality as an outsider to their campus community and to them.
4. Focus groups were included in this study's design, but no focus groups were ultimately conducted at either site. While promoted via the same means as the interviews – via electronic dissemination managed by site contacts, via print-outs provided in all classrooms and common areas, and via in-person introductions during class observations and visits—no students at either site volunteered for focus groups. Some interest was expressed in informal conversations among students at both sites, but that may have been a function of their interest in interviews or offered in the spirit of welcome or support to

the researcher. However, restricted availability was likely a primary factor in limiting student interest in and/or time for focus group participation.

5. The lack of focus group facilitation and data in this study represents an important indicator of student interest, perceived value, and available time at both sites. However, it must be noted that it also represents a limit to the study in general, as it was one of the two data collection instruments designed for students but was not fulfilled.
6. The data analysis and reporting phases were interrupted in the spring, summer, and fall of 2015 due to illness on the part of the researcher. This interruption represented opportunities to interrupt rote momentum in favor of reflective, deliberate engagement with literature and data. During the “off” periods, engagement was maintained through communication with peer debriefers and memos, both of which contribute to study validity. However, it also bears noting as a limitation in terms of breaking the continuation of deep immersion in study literature and data analysis.
7. Limitations arising from researcher home computing access contributed to the employment of two different software and operational platforms to conduct qualitative data analysis (QDA) software-enabled coding and analysis functions. The benefits of using QDA software to enter and make meaning within a dense data set were determined to outweigh the disruptions and lack of cross-platform compatibility. Every measure was taken to ensure rigorous procedures within and across formats and platforms, with beneficial opportunities arising to interrupt and challenge rote coding momentum.
8. This study’s initial design targeted interviews with both first and final year students, in order to maximize the trustworthiness and reliability of the sample and create a fuller picture of both entry and exit experiences, expectations, and practices (Creswell, 2007). However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, student availability and voluntary participation prevented strict adherence to this target. While total student sampling falls

within study targets and represents a generative range of experience at both sites, including both new and graduating students, this range cannot be claimed to represent methods beyond convenience and snowball sampling.

9. This study's initial design also targeted two interviews with each participating student. However, as discussed in the prior limit and earlier in this chapter, student availability sometimes restricted availability to participate in two interviews. In acknowledgement of student restrictions, whenever it was made known by students that they suspected or knew that they would only be able to participate in one interview, the researcher combined both protocols. In all cases, priority was placed on creating conditions for a semi-structured conversation that privileged student experiences, ideas, and pacing. These decisions to honor student time and experience contribute significantly to the trustworthiness, reliability, and validity of the data. However, in total, any inconsistencies stemming from etic adjustments as opposed to more emic variance represent limits to the study, as do the inconsistencies in student participation frequency.
10. Finally, participants who joined and completed the study may represent a self-selected population of students and/or administrators whose experience with and attitudes about college learning and its influences, and/or higher education research, may not be characteristic of the population at large, whether at their sites or other similar regional sites.

Conclusion

It is hoped that despite these limitations, which will receive serious consideration in future iterations of data analysis and reporting, this study's scope and rigor of study yielded sufficiently trustworthy, valid, and significant exploratory findings regarding adult undergraduate learning situated within adult learning-specific institutions.

INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS: CHAPTERS 4, 5, 6

Thematic Organization

At both sites, student data findings mapped to the same thematic structure, outlined below. Chapter 4 illustrates the study's primary learning theme categories as exemplified by St. Clare University student vignettes, and Chapter 5 illustrates these thematic categories as exemplified by Mission University student vignettes. Chapter 6 discusses two major cross-site themes in greater depth.

Thematic Overview

The study data findings in Chapter 4 and 5 are organized within three overarching master thematic categories: (1) Students' Learning Practices, Styles, and Approaches; (2) Students' Primary Learning Influences; and (3) Students' Conceptualization of Learner Identities, Perspectives, and Experiences.

Theme 1 encompasses three subcategories associated with acts, skills, and assignments—Writing, Research, and Group Work/Collaborative Learning—and a fourth thematic subcategory reflecting associated Learning Perspectives, Attitudes, and Beliefs. Theme 2 includes three subcategories reflecting variance within and intersections across students' learning influences: The Role of Family, Peers, and Colleagues; Academic Choices, Goals, and Life Integration/Negotiation; and Institutional Contexts, Resources, and Relationships.

Chapter 6 discusses two major analytical themes emerging from the intersections across these categories: (1) Students' Use of Time and Seriousness About College, and (3) The Role of Reflection in Student Learning Narratives.

Pseudonyms are used for all participants; any participant reference to other identifiable people, institutions, or locations is abbreviated to the first letter of the referred first name or de-identified in brackets. It should be noted that this study's small student sample size cannot be claimed to represent generalizable perspectives across students' respective campuses and, as noted in Chapter 3, are reflective of student self-selection as well as this study's combination of purposeful, convenience, and snowball sampling. Ellipses typically reflect two excerpt styles: most frequently, they serve simply to eliminate interviewer interjections from the flow of student conversation; less frequently, they shorten an excerpt by condensing repeated information. Care was taken to avoid distorting students' discourse style and contextual detail, thus contributing to the length of most vignettes.

This report's prioritization of vignettes as evidence, and the analytical themes that these vignettes represent, are intended to engage "key moments" (Sullivan, 2012, pp. 172), while necessarily acknowledging the limitations and biases imposed by researcher selection. It also reflects attention to what Bamberger and Schön (1983) describe as the dilemma posed by the "hermeneutic circle," in which researchers' and participants' individual and collective meaning-making are mutually informed and "filtered" by their respective biases, experiences, and positionalities. In acknowledgement of this filter, this first iteration of reporting is informed by Bamberger and Schön's (1983) alternative framing of a "hermeneutic spiral," which moves "dialectically through possible interpretations." (70). The following chapters' employment of extended student vignettes are thus intended to illustrate both the construction and context of students' interview responses. This decision demonstrates researcher attempts to minimize filtering of individual statements, which by extension also offers readers their own entry to students' reflective narratives and contexts.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ST. CLARE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Profile

St. Clare University is the primary adult-serving branch campus of a private, nonprofit, Christian-affiliated university. The university represents the second highest proportion of adult learners in this study's metropolitan Midwestern location. This participating campus provides evening classes exclusively to adult baccalaureate students in the school of business and management. In addition to this study's site, the university has a main metropolitan area campus that is primarily residential, another adult-serving branch campus in a different county, a smaller metropolitan area adult-serving branch campus including non-degree courses, and 22 literacy programs located in small community centers, schools, and technical colleges throughout the state.

St. Clare's participating campus is located in a large suburban executive park. It occupies the ground floor of a corporate building that it shares with two smaller businesses. There are two parking lots and two building entrances, and the classrooms and staff offices branch out in three directions from the central hallway. The hallways, offices, and classrooms appear somewhat run down and on the dim side. There was no signage specific to the institution until the last couple of months of this study, at which time a large banner with one of the institution's mission statements, "our mission is to help you find yours," was located outside the advising office. When the advising office was subsequently relocated to the end of a different hallway, further from students' entrance into the building, the banner was moved inside the office rather than remaining visible from the hallway.

This site features twelve classrooms, one computer room, one small area off the main hallway with raised tables and a vending machine. The site is also minimally staffed; for the

majority of the study, there were two advisors, one of whom served as the campus manager, one enrollment specialist, and one admissions specialist. Until the final couple of months of this study, there was a dedicated advising office, in which the two site advisors shared an open desk area. There was a separate, small office for one enrollment specialist and one admissions specialist, both of whom are affiliated with a company to which the university outsourced school of business and management admissions, enrollment, and financial aid functions. The relocated advising office now encompasses the enrollment and admissions contract staff. The advising office used to be open concept, with its front door opening to a small seating area furnished with university degree program and counseling pamphlets, and a half-wall containing more pamphlets and a big candy bowl separating the advisors' large open desk area, across which students and advisors could chat while waiting for their appointments. Most often there was no queue, so students would typically grab some candy and sit down with their advisors right away, either for scheduled appointments, walk-in questions, or just to chat.

Upon the advising office relocation, and its incorporation of the outsourced admission and enrollment staff, the open concept was eliminated in favor of individual offices. The waiting area now comprises a few chairs along the front wall, and a small table with program and counseling pamphlets. Students were seldom observed sitting at the small raised tables near the vending machines. Before class or during breaks, they could sometimes be observed standing in hallways outside their classrooms, stepping outside in the parking lot to make a call, and, most commonly, simply staying in the classroom.

Supplementary interviews were conducted with the two advisors located at St. Clare's participating study campus, Hal and Zoe, and one advisor at St. Clare's main campus, Oliver, who advised some of the students at St. Clare's participating study campus. Shorter supplementary interviews were conducted with two administrators of academic and career

advising, Yvette and Olive, both of whom work at the main campus, and one academic advisor transitioning to career advising, Michelle, whom Hal trained at the study campus but works at the main campus. All interviews took place in participants' offices/cubicles.

Student Participants

Demographic information was not collected from students. Instead, interviews privileged an experiential and reflective discussion context, in which disclosure of personal information, such as background and associated details, was wholly optional. Mission University's participant sample was drawn from a predominantly white campus population. One student self-identified as a person of color, which is noted.

- Elyse is a white student pursuing a bachelor's degree in business management.
- Faith is a white student pursuing a bachelor's degree of business administration.
- Nina is a white student who had just completed the capstone course for a bachelor's degree in business administration.
- Odette is a white student pursuing a bachelor's degree in business management.
- Tony is a Hispanic student pursuing a bachelor's degree in business management.
- Yara is a white student pursuing a bachelor's degree in business management.

Primary Learning Theme 1: Practices, Styles, and Approaches

Writing

When discussing how they go about writing assignments, a common theme that students emphasized is the importance of sequencing and how their processes evolved since they started college. They also discussed how class time, learning styles, different perspectives, and personal connections to assignments all help inform their ideas and shape their process.

Elyse described how her approach to writing assignments aligns closely with her time management:

I look at length of the paper. So let's say if it's something that has to be three to four pages, I won't think about that until – I take everything a week at a time. Because everything is split up like that week. If it's a three to four page paper, I don't think about that til the week before. If it is a final paper that's got to be ten pages, I definitely start in on that right away... I like to divide my big tasks into small manageable ones. So I'm like, 'Well this paper has to at least be ten pages; I only have to do two pages once a week.' And that's nothing to me. So then I have time to go back and reread it and polish it up. So that's how I attack my homework. (Elyse, 063-066)

In her description, she also identified the ability to reread and revise as important to her. Faith shares that emphasis, noting that "...a lot of times I'll look through a lot of stuff all at once, and then I force myself to sleep on it. Then I'll go through and edit later. I just like to at least get to my editing process at least once. I usually wait until the day of to turn it in, just to make sure that I'm satisfied with it" (Faith, 119).

Nina focused on how class time helps inspire her ideas, and how a technique like freewriting has helped her capture the flow of her ideas separate from her later organization and rewriting processes:

It's just flowing. I'm getting excited about it and it's just going. I think one of the things that in our initial writing class that I really kind of adopted is just that freewriting. And not worrying so much about – get the thoughts out. And so sometimes I had some really pathetic – but it's just get them out...I'll come back and put it together or rearrange it. But I would say that excitement, you can feel. And you're just really into it. And to me, that's when I'm probably writing and doing my best with it – the capstone or anything else – that I just feel very engaged to it. And I get that feeling that, okay, I hit those points. And typically when I'm writing my paper I've got my markers of the things I need to include in different areas. And when I see them progressing then that's a good thing. (Nina, 098-102)

Yara also talked about class time's role in her process, emphasizing the multiplicity of ideas it exposes her to and situating it within a broader reflection on how her perspectives on writing and research have evolved over time:

Now that I've had a couple classes here, I really see that you can all have that same common goal, but it can be 20 different freeways that you're taking to get to that information. And so I think as a person, it's calmed me down a lot more on my approaches to things...When I

would do my papers before, I would kind of just start typing. You know?...And then I'd kind of go through it and maybe jumble a couple of things around. But it was pretty much whatever my thought process was...Like I was journal writing...Whereas now I tend to create myself a rough outline of the information I'm trying to stick into the paper. (Yara, 040-049)

Her use of outlines aligns with her understanding of academic writing conventions and her evolving thinking about the ways in which her classes and thinking help build a conceptual framework for her paper topic selection and writing process (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Lea & Street, 2006).

She went on to reflect on how she developed the habit of doing homework at the last minute, and how she has since shifted to a more deliberative process:

I still eventually just get to typing and I pause more...And tend to hit the Internet and just read different things on the topic. I get an idea and I'll kind of look at it and come back, whereas before I'd either get all my information together and throw it in a paper, or not care about the information, throw it in a paper...I always ended up with that same result. But it was more of a stressed crunch. Whereas now it's an enjoyable crunch that I've been giving myself. Because I kind of know where I want to approach it. I mean, I could be taking a shower and start getting ideas as to what I wanna do in a paper. Which, prior to being here? Never happened...I never took the time to put a thought into something I was doing. I've always just been the girl who got an A. Sat down, got my A, and continued on with my day. And I think I'm retaining a lot more, taking these different approaches. (Yara, 040-053)

As part of this self-awareness and adaptation of her preference to linger in the brainstorming phase before writing, she also describes how she has discovered different parts of her process to align with different learning styles and approaches. For instance, hands-on, interactive classes are specific catalysts for her ideas, while “reviewing it all, very quiet. Maybe subtle music going on for me” (Yara, 029).

Tony also expressed that his learning style is both visual and hands-on, and that he “like[s] to learn by watching everybody” (007). He emphasized that seeing sample assignments help him better align his efforts with instructor expectations: “I need to know what you want. Don't leave it

open to interpretation, I guess. The more detail, the better. Show me a past project.” (Tony, 188-189). An influential learning experience that aligned closely with Tony’s learning style was a Six Sigma training, in which varied project models were used to facilitate highly hands-on, collaborative training and new project development. Indicating that St. Clare’s syllabi are often vague, which Faith noted as well, he also expressed that instructors are sometimes surprised when he asks for more details or for examples. He shared an example of the kind of assignment that he thinks would benefit from models:

...the more specific one I asked was for a Microsoft project class. I’d never used the software, and he wanted me to make charts and all kind of stuff. And I go, first of all, I don’t know how to install an IP system. And I don’t know how you want it to look. I don’t know how long it’s going to take to install the wiring and the harnesses and who I need to [inaudible 00:25:04]. Am I making these numbers up?...Yeah, you’re supposed to make numbers up. I’m like, “How am I supposed to know?” (laughs)...So it would be like me telling you how long’s it going to take to assemble a, telephone system in the building. I don’t know.” (Tony, 206-211)

When he has received specific instruction and/or models for projects, such as in an Information Systems class he described as offering a “perfect” example, he explained that he starts projects sooner and more methodically: “I knew exactly what to do; where to go...So knowing what I had to do, I started – I opened up PowerPoint or Word document. I put the session in one document. I just compile my different arguments, different viewpoints in each document. And then towards the end of the class – or, not the end of the class; the end of – by the due date I started compiling them all down and perfecting my final presentation” (Tony, 012-017).

When describing how he is trying to improve his writing process, he noted that “I would start sooner and highlight a lot more...Highlight a lot more in detail. And cover whatever aspects that they want covered. Origin, history, whatever...looks interesting...Take it and like try to regurgitate it without saying what they’re saying. Just use that” (Tony, 228-233). He also discussed his interest in looking beyond academic resources when writing about topics like

religion or culture, particularly in classes where he perceives the instructor or primary texts to leave out diverse perspectives or to assume authority about a culture they don't share (Alfred, 2002; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Harper, 2012). He shared, "I expected an instructor that was going to say, 'These are all of them.' And choose which one you want, I guess. Not, 'Here's all of them, but this one's the right one'" (Tony, 217-218). With regard to a paper on Hinduism he wrote for that class, he described his decision to broaden the scope of his research and cited information beyond the constraints of the course's operational paradigm:

...I also mention, hey, I have a few friends that are doing this and they don't feel – I asked specifically about this one topic and they said, "No, that's not the way we feel." Some people look at it that way. But they explain to me that – what was it about? – sorry, it was Hinduism. They have this caste system; I don't know if you're familiar with it. Where you're born into the caste, you're going to stay in that forever. And they said, "That's not true." People like to say that's your locked into that thing without having to think about it. You go to the doctor's office, you see a Hindu doctor. You see them moving up. You can ask them what were their parents, and they'll tell you they were something else. So that goes to show that we're not locked into it that you cannot progress yourself. So basically he says I disagree with that. So I put that down in there. Just stuff like that. I pull in whatever. (Tony, 237)

Perhaps reflective of the value he placed on situating his academic efforts within existing models and information, he demonstrated here a commitment to learning and bringing in alternative models to the dominant perspectives expressed by instructors and/or primary texts (Alfred, 2002; Janks, 2010). This is also suggestive of a questioning stance toward notions of evidence. In doing so, he demonstrated a stance toward enlarging both his own learning and the types of informational and learning frameworks he chose to bring to his classmates and instructors.

Yara also talked about a religion class, from the perspective of how much it opened her eyes to different perspectives and intersections of religion, culture, gender, relationships, and identities:

The topic is – and it doesn't seem like it's anything that you would use in a day to day, but even at that, it helped me to kind of have a different respect, I think, for people. I tend to try to respect people in general, but just kind of understanding where their beliefs come from, as to why – maybe this woman just wants to be very plain, and why does she go home after a long day and do all this stuff for her husband when they're equals. So it kind of gave me a different look as to what brings people together, and just how much even religions are so intertwined. Everybody's got their own. So that was a very exciting; I went home and I was telling my kids all about Pocahontas and the real story of it."

She also discusses how opportunities to learn about and from differences informed how she interacts with people at work. Tony mentioned in a different context that at St. Clare, he learned more about how to communicate with family as well as colleagues. While Tony's expressed professional experiences more actively engaged with multicultural perspectives and interests, and he assigned less value to the role of the religion class in his business program track in exposing him to different perspectives, Yara observed that she drew on courses like this religion class as a complement to her business classes for better understanding and interacting with people.

Another dimension of learning practices that students expressed was their underlying personal motivations, approaches, or choices (Alfred, 2002b). For example, Odette talked multiple times about her experiences volunteering at a senior living center, which she chose as the site of an interview project. When describing her choice to use this writing assignment to revisit this center, she explained, "I volunteer with...a senior living center...I kind of got impassioned by my experiences at a nursing home with my grandmother. I realized a lot of people that age are alone and lacking companionship..." (Odette, 101). She then moved into describing one particular staff member who had become a profound mentoring influence in her life, and about whom she focused her interview project:

"It got me to think, "What defines success? What makes you successful?" I had a different mindset about what that probably meant. But her whole mindset was how do you want people to remember you? And that's how she lives her life. How do you want to be remembered? Not what makes you successful. Everybody has different questions that they ask; personal fulfillment, or where do you see yourself, or what kind of life do

you want to lead? For her, her mantra was what do you want people to say about you? And that's what I titled my profile. But it was a really tough assignment... And I still don't know if I did it justice. (Odette, 122)

She expressed the multidirectional influences fueling her volunteer and academic work, and emphasized her mentor's impact on her conceptualization of learning in, about, and on behalf of improving the world. Seguing to the final example in this section, Odette reflected on how her positionality proved inseparable from how she chose to write about her mentor. She explained how she "started with my story. What I started in my paragraph was – my first introduction was how I got off rail; off track. That led me to Luther Manor, and then that led me to her" (Odette, 122). She also delved into the mutual motivations and challenges she chose to take up:

It's harder for me to write things that are emotional. When I'm doing research and I'm analyzing – that's why the position paper was the easiest to do. For me. But the profile, the personal stuff, was a lot harder. I could have just made it about her. And I thought about doing it that way. Like a profile that you read in the newspaper about somebody...She had a very compelling story. I loved her story. But I started to incorporate me into her story. And I'm like – because it was the only way I could really highlight why I thought she was so admirable. It was the compassion she shows to everybody else...And all the people that I worked with in business, that I thought I admired, none of them had the qualities she did. If that makes any sense... She's brilliant enough that she could probably run a company, but she doesn't. This is what she wants. She wants to help other people. This is her place... she makes a connection with everybody, and she's all about helping you. She senses what you need, and she reacts. I loved her in this...Here was this woman who was basically a CNA, who was running the whole show. Through compassion and through warm leadership...All these therapists were relying on her. She guided the entire department. (Odette, 103-107)

Having discussed throughout the course of her interview how she was unsure about her readiness for college, including being unsure about what the gaps in her experience—caused by her decision to stop working and become a caregiver for a terminally ill friend—could mean for her, Odette expressed a nuanced understanding of writing conventions, and how writer positionality influences choices in narrative topics and construction alike (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Lea & Street, 2006). Further, through these reflections, Odette demonstrated willingness to revisit

difficult, often painful aspects of her personal and professional histories as opportunities to learn even more about herself, about others, and about how to conceptualize her commitments to herself in and for the world (Alfred, 2002b; Brookfield & Holst, 2011).

Research

Faith and Elyse described their respective criteria for gathering sufficiently different sources of information to activate and shape their research papers. Elyse noted that “a lot of times I’ll, when I research, I look specifically for – let’s say Aristotle for my paper – I’ll read several things about him, write down my notes. But then I like to look for that thought – not thought – information in several places just so I know it’s right” (Elyse, 077-078). Faith also emphasized the importance of personal connection to the topic, explaining, “Even if they give you options to pick from, the thing that you can become most passionate about is what I like to choose. Just because I get bored easily, and I don’t want to research things that I don’t care about. My go-to is Google; I’m not going to lie. I get the initial information there” (Faith, 109). She went on to connect her initial idea generation process to a more sequential and organized development of those ideas, describing that “From there I search a little more. I’ve been using the library tools, I guess I’ll say, quite a bit. I don’t know. I guess I try to – after my initial Google search I’ll try to pick four or five subjects of my three that I want to narrow it down to. There’s those five, narrow it down, and start a little bit of an outline” (Faith, 109-110).

Nina also addressed this role of sequencing in her reading and research processes:

So I would say that for myself it was more about sometimes working backwards was something that I found. I would spend so much time on research, and reading and reading, and then feel so (sigh) by the time that I got to writing some of my larger papers. And instead some of the ways to outline, some of the ways to be able to perform better research, and not feel like you’re starting with so much. There’s a number of different formats that instructors have given us to break down and keep you from having too many topics, and narrow things. And I think refining it, reading wise, I’ve learned that for myself I need to be sitting more at a

– like in a structure than trying to get through my last couple of chapters before I go to bed or something. I just don’t have the same focus. (Nina, 039)

In describing how she has refined her approach based on her awareness of how times of day influenced her focus, Nina reflected on her commitment to structuring and maximizing her efforts to keep her energized and focused while continuing her work late into the night. She also demonstrates purposeful review of multiple note-taking formats, selecting approaches that aligned with different phases of her reading and research.

Group Work and Collaborative Learning

St. Clare University requires group projects, including community service projects, in most classes. As a result, students talked in detail about the benefits and challenges they represent. They also discussed the value they found in collaborative learning outside the structure of group projects.

Elyse and Faith described largely positive experiences with group projects. While Faith observed that group work grading policies could be a “little maddening” (151) for students who did the bulk of the work while others who didn’t contribute as much received the same grade, she also emphasized what she found as the benefit of collaborative learning and its alignment with one of her major learning styles: “As a learner. I’m a very hands on learner; visual learner. I actually learn best when I’m attempting to teach, if that makes any sense. ... Sometimes the group work and whatever else – if it’s taken seriously, it’s a really good way for me to learn (Faith, 042-046). Elyse described the role that her first community service project played in building relationships with her peers, as well as in her comfort and participation in the classroom:

Both times the community service project were awesome. The first one that I did in the associate program, we did bingo with a nursing home that had nuns. And so there, our cohort was big. Bigger at the time. It was the first class. So there were 11, 12 of us or whatever. And

I was brand new to school. I didn't know any of these people. That was the opportunity that I had to get to know them on a social level and be comfortable. And that project made me not afraid to ask questions in class. (Elyse, 329-330)

There was also significant emphasis on how class style and format joined group projects in contributing to students' desired levels of interaction and collaboration. For instance, Nina explained how in-class interaction provided a sense of belonging and support that was absent in online courses:

I think for my preference, the in-class is really a combination between the instructor led lecturing and discussion. But the piece that I felt really was missed through the online was the discussion with my cohort. There's so much that we offer to each other, and the support has been phenomenal. Where you really learn from each other. And there's strengths that you share. And within group projects – I feel that the whole component of group project really makes a difference when you're in that classroom. Definitely there's ways around it within the online, but I felt it was just a little bit more impersonable and didn't really promote or encourage picking up the phone and actually having a conversation. (Nina, 008-009)

Yara agreed, noting “I could definitely never be an online student. Reading information and reading other people's thoughts on something is great to kind of supplement the information that I have...But I'm more a hands on visual, let me see it, let me discuss it—if I have a question, maybe somebody else is verbalizing something in a different way than I am. Versus reading it, and I'm not hearing that tone” (Yara, 020-025).

Tony also noted the important role that instructors play in fostering interactive and collaborative learning: “I think being engaged more. Ask me my opinion, get me involved in the conversation; I'm going to retain it a lot more than I would. So I need to be involved” (Tony, 182-183). As with the other student discussions, Tony emphasized not only what helps his engagement and retention, but also his willingness to put in the effort to be an active, involved member of the class's learning community.

Odette offered a different perspective on St. Clare's online courses in terms of interaction and collaboration: "The people online are – so far; I only have this one class – but people are much more thoughtful. In terms of they don't just blurt things out. You've got that opportunity to really think it through. I think people are more polite to each other" (028-029). She described herself elsewhere as an introvert who likes to take her time, observe, and consider how to engage in class, suggesting alignment with the learning experience offered by online courses. With regard to group projects, she noted that they require significant time and effort and are often challenging, but that she's had a chance to work with "some really, really sweet people," and "I'm excited." "Because I get the most out of things when I connect, really click" (Odette, 032-033).

At the same time, Odette identified weaknesses in St. Clare's reliance on group work as opposed to collaborative activities within class. She used words like "nonsense" to describe the significant amount of time devoted to groups, and expressed frustration with group grading policies that she felt penalized some group members when other students did not fulfill their portion of the work. She also indicated that she heard some students dropping out of St. Clare in favor of other regional schools due St. Clare's perceived overemphasis on formal group projects. However, she tended to emphasize individual classmates who made aspects of the group projects worthwhile for her, despite her overall frustration with St. Clare's approach to them:

And I'm not – there was a gentleman who was one of my favorites in the last group. He struggled with grammar. Grammar's not his strong suit. But his material was rich with research, and very thoughtful. You could tell he really invested a lot of time. I loved him; he was my favorite. I could handle the grammar. You know what I mean? It's like, "Oh, I can do that." He saw, for example, some work that I had revised for him... There was this real mutual give and take there. I think that's the idea behind [St. Clare University]. But in practice, that's not reality. It's not reality at all. You've got the people who do and the people who don't, and I think that's overburdening the good students. Just my opinion. (Odette, 313)

In another recollection, she described her negotiation of group roles within a younger classmate, whom she likened to another study participant, Hannah, her classmate in another course:

But when I saw that veering off, then I went, “We need to do this a little differently.” And then I got resistance, and a little resentment. Yeah. It was like that little Hannah? You know? I really liked her, because she was a pistol. But also had very strong opinions on pretty much everything. And I was dealing with somebody like her in this group too. And really don’t know how to be challenged...It was, “Fine. Let’s do it your way then.” And I just kind of went, “Okay, sounds good.” The same age, too. I loved her though. She’s a bright girl. ... Like, man, you remind me of that little Hannah pistol that was sitting here just – she was all piss and vinegar. But I love that. I like meeting different people and different personalities. You’ve got the extroverts, and then you’ve got the introverts. I love studying people. I just love people watching. (Odette, 036-037)

It is noteworthy that Hannah and Odette were both in a writing course that I observed, and it was through that course that I originally connected with them. Odette and Hannah both talked about each other to me outside of the formal interview setting, with affection and admiration for what the other brought to their collective class experience. This aligns with the interactions I observed in class. Based on what each participant mentioned about their academic background and years of work experience, a 10-15 year age difference might be conjectured between the two, which Odette refers to in describing “little Hannah.” One interpretation of such language may suggest a minimizing perspective regarding Hannah’s youth, with implications for their respective constructions of individual and collaborative learning spaces in and out of the classroom. It may also be noteworthy that the added dialogical context of the interview exchange included accompanying laughter. Given these multiple contexts for listening to and interpreting Odette’s responses, it may also read as suggestive of admiration for the younger woman’s strength of voice and fearlessness in expressing opinions. That said, this example also exemplifies the complication of phenomenographic qualitative research reporting, in which the researcher is a constitutive factor in the relational narrative that unfolds with and across participants (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984)

Primary Learning Theme 2: Perspectives, Attitudes, and Beliefs

A consistent theme throughout student reflections on their learning perspectives, attitudes, or beliefs is a desire to find value even in assignments that don't initially appear to align with their interests or learning styles. For example, Elyse explained that "...in my view, all of those assignments are there for a reason, and I try to find the reason. I guess there's been a few assignments where I feel like I don't find the reason for it. But for the most part I understand what they're trying to accomplish with the assignments that they give" (Elyse, 139-140).

She also described an awareness of her academic skills and weaknesses, emphasizing that she does not want to focus solely on skills or assignments that she knows yields good grades for her. Instead, she explained:

I feel like I want my strength to be presenting. It's not. I don't really think it is. I'm very nervous about doing that. I think my strengths are putting together, researching and doing my papers. 'Cause I can actually—someone's not asking me to produce something regularly; I have time to go back and think about what I want to say, how I want to say it. And I'm very good at that. All my papers are pretty good. I'm pretty proud of those. (Elyse, 057-058)

Despite discussing here and elsewhere in the interview that she has developed confidence and earned As in her research and writing projects, she consistently emphasized her desire to use her time in college to push past her comfort level and focus on skills, like presenting, that cause her anxiety, yet she knows are important for her academic development and future career goals.

Faith also described writing as a strength and notes that detailed feedback tailored to her individual assignments is helpful to her as a learner. As noted prior, she also identified personal connection as a criterion for selecting research projects. However, she distinguished the desire for personalized assignment focus and feedback from an expectation that she will only be learning from instructional or feedback styles that match her own:

Feedback is nice, but I'm very—I don't want anybody to tailor to me. Because if anything that's going on in my personal life or whatever, I hold myself to the same expectations as I would expect for other people. As for people knowing more about my personal life or whatever, no. I don't. I wouldn't actually want that. Because if people did feel bad for me or whatever the case may be, I wouldn't want that to change what my grade is, what anything is; perceptions on me or anything like that...I just want to be a good student. (Faith, 061-064)

Here, as elsewhere, Faith reflected a high bar for her performance and learning despite challenges, as well as the value she placed on feedback that takes her work seriously on its own merits, without accommodation. When describing a rewarding class experience full of interactive discussion on charged topics, she made note of her instructor's role in modeling, encouraging, and challenging different perspectives:

She came into the first class and said, "I want you all to have your own opinion, but I want you to support your opinions." Every time that somebody had something to say—and it was made to be a controversial class. Every time somebody had something to say she's like, "Okay, why?" A lot of it she didn't agree with, and you could tell. She's trying not to force her own opinion. But she's like, "No, why? Why?" That's kind of a cool thing to see. Like I said, she had her own opinion. She definitely interjected in there, and it's kind of—I don't know. Like I said, I like seeing everybody else's different views on things. (Faith, 064-065)

Odette also reflected on the value of different perspectives in her learning, and emphasized her sense of responsibility for researching and thinking more about topics that are new to her. She also described how she conceptualized reason and its value for engaging with different perspectives and topics:

We can have assumptions about anything. But applying reason is actually going through, I think, a process – a logical process – to build information to form an educated opinion on what you're learning about. I could've made assumptions about Pakistan. I probably had my own idea about that. But then as I researched it and I learned about it, I realized that there was a lot I didn't know. So that's a process. But how you approach it, I think, with an open mind, and to try to have a thorough analysis – are all sides represented? You and I talked about this before, about how people, they're glomming to these websites...that supports or validates their point of view. There was somebody in the national news not too long ago – there was some celebrity that didn't know who a very predominant conservative was; she had no idea. I'm like, right. That's the whole problem with the dialogue right now. You don't have to agree with this predominant conservative, but if you don't know who they are then – but

we're becoming so tunnel focused on what validates us. That's the opposite of reason, in my opinion. (Odetta, 186-189)

In discussing the importance of rigorous and open-minded research to her learning, she also situated its importance to a broader sense of awareness in and about the world (Brookfield & Holst, 2011). She identified the role that assumptions play in her learning, both validating their pervasiveness and influence, and recognizing the limitations they can impose.

Tony also addresses notions of assumption and bias in describing how he negotiates issues of difference in the classroom. He described his thought process in deciding whether or not to participate in classes, citing a recent religion course:

Sometimes I feel I ask the question maybe I shouldn't have... Well, the instructor for our religion class, he asked me what I felt about the topic. I said, "Well, right now, from what I'm understanding is it seems to me that it was just one religion." "From what I'm getting," I said, "And over time, it was told and told and told and it evolved to whatever that person believed, the area, the time, and it just kept on growing, and growing, and growing. Kind of like the telephone games you play when you were kids in school. The teacher told one student, then before you know it, it was a totally different message." I said, "From what I'm getting, the stories I'm hearing, they're kind of all similar. They all seem to mesh." And he goes, "Yeah... I kind of see that, how they could have taken it from us. We speak of a great flood; they speak of a great flood. I'd see how they could mimic us." And then I said, "Well how do you know it wasn't the other way around?" And he kind of looked at me like, ah. (laughs) Maybe I shouldn't have asked. (Tony, 114-118)

This example illustrates not only Tony's nuanced thinking about religion's historical and sociocultural construction and development, but also the degree of engagement and interest he contributed to class discussion. Embedded here is consideration of how his different perspective might challenge or enlarge what he sees as the instructor's homogenizing and Western-centric perspective (Alfred, 2002; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Harper, 2012). It also speaks to the role of instructors in fostering student participation and learning, and the assumptions that are embedded in practice. As Tony demonstrated, the ways in which "difference" is framed can conflate

engagement and appreciation with tolerance and othering, amplifying some voices and silencing others (Alfred, 2002; Harper, 2012).

Yara described how she frames and engages difference as key to her learning, specifically identifying her peers' multicultural backgrounds as an important dimension to a co-constructed class learning experience:

Class time plays a key, a very key role. I try to be here at least a half hour before class. And I'll review the readings and the things that I've highlighted, etc. I think that it's very important to bounce ideas off of your fellow classmates. We all come from different backgrounds, we all have different – you know, not just educational but ethnic backgrounds, work backgrounds. It's such a melting pot... That it would be silly to not pull from that pot and taste the lentils or taste the beef. So the classroom is a very key role for me. It's good to be able to – I think I understand better, as the teacher is asking – somebody might ask a question that I wouldn't even think to ask.... And if I was online learning and reading this information, I'm not going to hear that tone and emphasis. If I'm reading the book, I'm reading the book on a no knowledge basis.... If I'm reading in the classroom, you know, maybe somebody who does have knowledge on the topic, or the teacher can expand the structure. So just kind of having that social interaction and being able to kind of remove myself from kids, work, chores, everything else, and just give myself that four hours that is just for me to take as much as I can from the experience.... And then go home and kind of just bask in it. I truly – I'm meant to be a student.” (Yara, 076-085).

Yara's reflection suggests a receptive stance in which there is both expectation of and engagement with the sociocultural and professional dimensions of her classmates' lives and identities, beyond general constructions of difference. Also striking is how she described her learning inside the classroom as one that she takes home with her to “bask in.” Amidst dominant discourses that inscribe adult college-going within operational and workforce limits, her affirmation “I'm meant to be a student” challenges these limits and narratively reframes her as a full participant in the intellectual, social, and civic enterprise of higher education. (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007)

As part of their reflections on their learning styles and attitudes, students emphasized the value of different perspectives and identities in their collective and individual learning

experiences. This distinction offers a relevant nuance to students' subsequent discussion of challenges encountered in relation to faculty, resources, and policies. As will be demonstrated further, it is not the differences of practitioner perspective that represent the dominant obstacles for students, but rather a disconnect between student expectations and instructional and advising practices that inhibit active engagement and degree management—and, in some cases, risk impeding degree completion.

Primary Learning Influences

Role of Peers, Family, and Colleagues

Students consistently emphasized personal connections to St. Clare University and to relationships and dialogue with other people as key to their learning processes and experiences. As Elyse explained, “I have a really good friend, she comes here, and she does studies. And anytime I can help her with anything, I’m always – because I would want someone to help me. You know what I mean? So of course I’m going to help somebody else. And it’s fun to be a part of something” (373-374). Her reflection demonstrated not only her personal connections to a sense of learning community and support, but also an emphasis on reciprocity (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007).

Faith described the different roles that friends and family play in her learning:

There’s a few go-to people, actually. One of them is a good friend of mine that I work with. He recently finished his MBA in a similar type of class format. I really like bouncing ideas off of him. Just because he’s been in this similar situation lately. He likes to see views other ways, too, so he [inaudible 00:21:35] as much as I do, and tries to force himself to see it from different points of view. That gives me six points of view instead of three. Like my sister, I told you, it’s nice to get the, what were your instructors really looking for when you have the assignment that you read and you’re like, “What? I don’t understand.” She’s been helpful with that. I have another friend of mine from high school that we talk about my school all the time, and what I do. And my mom. But other than that I kind of keep to myself about it unless I’m really excited about it; I’ll talk about it at work or whatever. Not to get input; just to, “Hey.” Tell a story. (122-125)

Faith's example reflected not just the different people and dynamics that influence her learning process, but also the different roles they play across multiple points in her learning, from brainstorming ideas and clarifying assignments to talking about exciting topics and assignments.

In the course of her interview, Nina shared multiple examples of group projects that demonstrates the value she places on collaborative learning as well as her emphasis on peers and family members, like her husband, as key to her learning. Also evident in the following example is her emphasis not just on collaboration but on responsibility to and empathy with the complexity of her classmates' lives:

So it really came down to just keeping up with those and continuing to go back and really make sure you were on track so as we got to the final weeks and we started to put together our final drafts and presentations, you were very vested in what you put together. Almost to a point where you didn't want to read it anymore. You know, you felt like you were just reading [inaudible 00:28:33] like, "I read those before." But I think it was good experience. And one that, really, was another testament to wow, I can do this. Because there was so much involved in other assignments at the same time, if you fell behind you were in trouble. We had a couple people that dropped in week seven, eight. And it's such a shame. It's like, 'No, let's help you get back in...' You don't want someone to have to drop. But if you're not staying above with what you need to, it's very hard to catch up at that point. So I would say that assignment – I was making sure for myself – I need it done before that due date, and have time to step away from it, come back, read through it. I always had my husband read through it. I need someone to get the – I know what I wanted to say. It's about having somebody else. (065)

The sense of commitment and reciprocity she demonstrated toward her classmates is similar to Elyse's, including her awareness of how important relationships and support, both in and out of the classroom, are to the adult undergraduate experience (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

Tony emphasized the role that his family plays in motivating, challenging, and deepening his understanding of class topics:

I tap into, talk with my wife a lot. She's – I couldn't do it without her. So my family too – my daughter, walks past and she'll help me out...My wife – so, like, the religion class, she'll explain to me. She was brought up Jehovah's Witness. I was raised Catholic. I see differences, and I'll ask her, 'Do you think this is okay?' And she'll explain to me, 'Why don't you think about it this, this, and this way?' I'm like, okay, that makes sense. I can see why they think this. And I can see why they would feel that way...Or else she'll help me – just if I'm getting frustrated, she'll say, 'Just relax. It's almost done with.' She'll bring it back down. And the kids too. (266-269)

This example also demonstrates his awareness of the multiple backgrounds, identities, and positionalities that people bring to their relationships and learning. Yara also affirmed the importance of family to how she conceptualizes, motivates, and embeds learning across multiple dimensions of her learning lives in and out of the classroom:

Learning is huge. Huge for me. I can't express it enough, even to my children. They're all full school age, with two of them even being in high school. And so I try to tie in learning into everything we do. I mean, teaching them how to balance a checkbook, teaching them how to cook. I'm not going to make more money unless I learn this. Learning is really – that is our central focus in our household. Obtaining new knowledge. And that you're always – every day you learn something new. And so each day I get home and ask my kids, "What's something new you did today?" Well, what's something new you read? What's something new you watched? What's something new you heard? What'd you see on Facebook? Every day we kind of focus on what's new with our day. (043-044)

In this reflection, she also demonstrates both attention to and embrace of the multiple learning and literacy contexts that her children experience as well as she does as an adult undergraduate (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

Academic Choices and Life Integration/Negotiation

Students highlighted the influence of family factors in their choices to attend college at St. Clare University, as well as the ways in which they navigate across their personal, family, and professional lives and commitments. Faith noted that personal and professional issues influenced her choice of St. Clare's weekly, evening courses: "Well I've been wanting to get back to school for quite some time...The schedule was the biggest thing for me. The one night a week. Mostly

working on my own. Well, in adult life, lots of stuff going on” (011-014). Elyse explained how significant family health challenges and loss both influence and motivated her decision to move forward with enrolling at St. Clare: “With me, I kept talking about going back to school, going back to school. And I have, 2011 is when I went back. It was my worst year ever. My uncle passed away, my mom got diagnosed with cancer. I didn’t want that to be the year of that. So I was like, this is going to be the year I go back to school. And it was. So I did it” (013-014). While highlighting how much challenge and personal cost was involved in deciding to open her life to college, she also frames it as an opportunity to reflect on her experiences and open herself to the possibilities that college could add to her already complex life (Schön, 1983; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

With regard to what those choices and their negotiation look like, Yara noted that she finds it “relaxing” to devote Sundays solely to homework:

“The further the classes go, the more time I realize I need to block. So I’ve pretty much blocked out all day Sunday now, where it used to be I’d try to get a couple hours here, couple hours here, couple hours here. And I get started and then I get stopped. So now Sundays are pretty much – I stop to switch laundry. And other than that, it’s a full day of really going back through things. With my Monday nights, I’ve let all my family know. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday I’m completely unavailable. So unless it’s an emergency, don’t call me. Which I didn’t look at it like that before. Because, “Oh, I can balance everything.” No, I cannot balance everything. I am not a juggler. I was not meant to be a juggler. I don’t like the circus. I think that’s really changed, is that I’m learning that it’s really important to set aside scheduled blocks of time to actually do my homework instead of, “Oh, I’ll get this done.” It doesn’t work that way.” (010-011b)

This vignette lends dimension to Yara’s prior description of her approach to assignments as more of a “crunch,” and the extent to which she has restructured her family life to accommodate both college requirements and her own required conditions for doing her best work. Nina described a similar negotiation, but highlights the role that her job played in her mutually personal and professional decision to attend college at St. Clare:

...it's really something that I personally wanted to do. And was kind of hesitant. I definitely-- the employer that I'm at I've been there now 19 years. And I was advancing. But not in a financial place to just stop working and go to school full time. And found it kind of daunting to think eight, ten years to get through my four year degree. So as I got to the point of thinking that, hey, I'm not getting any younger; I need to do this; I want to do this for myself, that I was able to find this program. And really, in meeting with the advisors here, decided that it really worked for both my responsibilities at home, responsibilities with work. It was something I could accommodate and still in a timeframe with it being accelerated and being yearlong classes, it was manageable to be able to get through it. And you felt you were making progress. So it's been a definite -- I think there's tradeoffs there. I think the tuition was higher than some of the other more traditional or technical schools. But I think, all in all, it's been a really good choice. And I've been happy with it." (Nina, 014-018)

She also described location as a key deciding factor that helped made her sacrifices and time commitments easier to manage: "Location. It was fantastic. This is about 15 miles from home. So it wasn't far. And at the time I was actually just working -- one of our locations was just down the street. So it really was convenient that way. So I think it just, overall, it just worked" (020-022). She also noted that the small, weekly classes and the cohort structure contributed further incentive and support, helping her as she went "...through a lot of things. And a lot of support. So I think the decision was one -- based on the way they explained the setting, it really did turn out the way that -- and really come to what I expected it to be like" (Nina, 022-024).

Tony's reflection on his choices identified the complicated role that employer tuition reimbursement can contribute. He explains that having spent 14 or 15 years working at his present job, he was laid off as part of a massive restructuring. Describing his thoughts upon observing the start of the layoffs, he said:

I'm like, 'Woah.' They pay for my tuition reimbursement. I never took advantage of it, really. Doing well here. Why -- this train is great! I'm going to ride it. And it didn't work out that way. So then I got laid off. They gave me a severance package to go to school. So I started looking into it, looking into it. Started working at another company. And then they gave me a phone call and said, 'Hey, you applied for a job a while back. Are you still interested in coming back?' ...So I jumped back, and this time I'm taking advantage of the tuition reimbursement. I'm trying to get it done as fast as possible just in case it does happen again. (031)

While employer tuition support represents a critical factor in college affordability and feasibility, Tony identified the instability that employment conditions can also bring to longer term views of the time involved in pursuing and completing a college degree. In doing so, he also emphasized the role that his family plays in motivating him and his overall efforts to maintain and model academic persistence despite other destabilized professional contexts: “Kids—you know, they see me working on stuff. My son, he asked to go fishing or something. Let’s go outside, play some football or baseball. And me, I can’t, I say I’ve got to finish this. And he’s bummed out, but I use that as a, ‘See, now you go to school now so when your kids are older, you won’t have to.’ So, now I have to do it, because they’re watching” (Tony, 269). Having deferred prioritizing his own education in favor of heavy commitments to his job, Tony’s layoff recentered his college-going commitments as a model for how and why he is encouraging his children to prioritize college in their own lives.

Finally, Odette’s reflection on her decision to enroll focused on her fears about her readiness, as well as how the mutually personal and professional decisions to interrupt her job to become a caregiver would reflect on her in an academic setting:

But I was really worried about my gap. And I hadn’t really talked to anybody. And J [enrollment specialist] says to me... ‘First of all, your gap doesn’t mean anything.’ She said, ‘I mean, you’ve got over 20 years of sound business experience. Nobody is going to care – you’ve got a good reason why. Just tell them what you just told me.’ A lot of people understand that, if you have to take time off. Or a sick relative; you did. So that helped. But the other – I never – nobody asked me until J what did I want? And sat there – and she had forms for just what do you see, what are the things that you’re most interested in? What are things about your life you’re most passionate about? And sitting here thinking, this is probably the first time ever I’ve given this any thought. Because things have a way of just happening to you... And that’s what happened to me. I got a call about a job when I was 21. I’d been working for a dental office, and it was finally a chance to work for a company. So I didn’t choose the financial business; it chose me. I didn’t choose technology; it chose me. So now what do I want to do with all of that? (007-009)

She highlighted the importance of St. Clare's enrollment specialist in situating her gap within a broader framing of thoughtful decisions and extensive experience, encouraging her to reframe her own self-conceptualization as a learner and college student. She also expresses how the domains of personal and professional lives do not exist along discrete boundaries but rather intersect and inform each other, as do the multiple factors in choosing—or being “chosen by—a job, a field, or a role. Her reflection lent dimension to how the factors influencing student enrollment can be conceptualized. Neither the decision nor the trajectory are simple, and both are reflective of complex intersections across time, cost, roles, commitments, experience, motivation, access, and opportunity.

Institutional Offerings, Resources, and Relationships

The theme of institutional offerings and resources is exemplified by St. Clare's students' reflections on negative experiences or obstacles to successfully enrollment, navigation, or completion, as opposed to personal struggles with concepts, assignments, or work/life balance. What is also evident in student responses, however, is a generosity or empathy toward instructors whom they described as ineffective or dismissive. In some cases, students conjectured about and contextualized instructors' lives as part of dealing with the implications of their negative experience with them. In other examples, students stressed positive aspects of the institution or other instructors, maintaining an overall enthusiasm for the institution despite even significant risks or obstacles to their academic success.

The stakes are high for adult students taking classes at night 1-2 times a week, as participating students at both sites do, when they receive incorrect or conflicting information about required courses, or when those courses are disrupted or shortened by faculty absenteeism. The alignment (or lack thereof) between student and faculty personalities, learning/teaching styles, and expectations also figures more prominently in student learning experiences due to the

lack of course options each term. If a St. Clare student needs a specific course to graduate, they do not usually have the luxury of selecting different instructors or times. Typically, there is either only one instructor for that course, or the course is only run every other term, sometimes just once every year. If students choose to attend courses at other St. Clare locations or online, that expands some of their options; however, students identified trade-offs to that flexibility, ranging from extended commutes to a preference for in-person courses versus online, despite the latter's significant flexibility in terms of asynchronous scheduling and elimination of commutes.

To stay on track for completing a baccalaureate degree, St. Clare University students must follow a regimented schedule that does not necessarily align with their own preferences for order, instructor, or type of courses. However, it is noteworthy that students consistently made it a point to identify the positive aspects of the institution amidst complaints. In particular, they also emphasized their own biases, roles, responsibilities, or strategies for making the most of their college education, despite setbacks or negative experiences.

Elyse expressed dissatisfaction with St. Clare's advising with regard to her course planning and management:

I thought—we had all taken a math class. It was a finite math class, and it was six weeks and it was worth three credits. They changed it now, and it is 12 weeks and worth six credits...so I'm like, "Oh, do I need this class?" You just have to really pay attention to what you need because you don't want to end up thinking you're ready to graduate and you actually need something. You have to really keep an eye on that. Keep very close with your advisors. If you ever have any questions – because no one's looking at my progress sheet, making sure I'm ready to graduate. That's up to me. (343-346)

She emphasized the risks of late or incorrect information about degree requirements and the necessity for students to seek and manage this information for themselves. In contrast, Nina had positive experiences with advising, but identified some instructors who were not engaged in teaching or fostering interactive discussions:

I think Hal as an advisor has been really hands-on. I've had him as an advisor for the last three and a half years. Really interested and available. I think...one of our writing instructors. And our economics instructor—I forget her name. But just really willing to help out. Different math instructors were really—I mean, we've really just had a lot of—like I feel like I've benefitted. Definitely had some instructors where we watched movies and didn't do much more than that... But I think it's, overall, there's a lot of instructors that have gone through the program...And so they realize what's all involved, and how it is. I think those two that have gone through—whether it's here, or another location, or they're teaching at multiple schools—I think they offer a lot, and have really understood the work life balance, and make it applicable to that. So I feel there's been a lot of value there. (114-117)

Nina observed here that firsthand understanding of the adult college experience, on both student and teaching levels, helped inform some instructors' ability to engage multiple dimensions of learning and identities in the classroom (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). She also shared an example of an instructor that did not appear to share that sensibility:

...the last class that I had, my capstone class, the instructor was maybe not – wouldn't have been my first choice for that class. We started off kind of rocky. She didn't show up to our first class. It was a lot of change in direction along the way, which caused a lot of rework. I will say that at one point before class started—I think during our fourth week—I said, "You know, the first time we met you mentioned we would have time in class. We're now eight sessions in to our 12 section paper and you've changed it again. Are we going to have time?"...And her response was, "Am I supposed to feel bad?"...And I said, "That wasn't my intent. But I truly want, as the instructor, I want you to understand the position that we're in as well"...and that was a class where I just, okay, I need to pull back and be very focused on what I need, and communicate on what I need to, because it was, to me, very disappointing. Because you've worked so hard to get to your capstone class, and your celebration of bringing everything together. (053)

In this example, Nina expressed a recurrent emphasis on mutual student and instructor responsibility to the collaborative learning community that is developed over the course of each term. The negative experience she described is suggestive of divergent values that she and the instructor assigned to class participation and to the capstone course itself. It also illustrates conflicting expectations for what participation in the class's learning community can or should look like. She expressed her willingness to make her stake in that learning community transparent

by asking the instructor to clarify adjustments to the course's time allotment and, further, by sharing her perspectives on how and why clearer communication between the instructor and students mattered so much to the capstone course experience.

From another vantage point, Elyse described a positive experience with a faculty member who received "mixed reviews" from her classmates:

...one of my classmates did not like him at all. She thought he was an asshole. She's like, "He acts like he's better than everybody. I don't like these comments that he's making, and I don't like the way he walks around the room." Because most of the teachers stand in front of the room – and everyone's got their laptop fired up. He completely walks around the room all the time. All the time. And it doesn't bother me. It bothered another one because she's like, 'I don't like that I can't see when he's talking.' ...And he was tough on people's grades, and these people didn't appreciate it the way I did....Like I said, some people really liked him. And I really did. I could not be bored in his class. He was very interesting. He had really good things to share. He brought in relevant news articles from things that were happening in business. And he actually brought these topics that forced us to actually engage with each other. And that's huge. Really – I really enjoyed him. I wouldn't mind having him again. (320-327)

In doing so, she took account of different students' criteria for instructor alignment with their learning styles, preferences, and processes. Faith also expressed mindfulness of instructors' lives and contexts when faced with evaluating less-than-satisfactory class experiences: "To be honest, on the last one I probably could have scored a little lower on things, but I felt really bad for the instructor, so I didn't. It's not that I don't feel like I can be; it's that I would be a terrible person if I gave him – you should hear this guy's story. It was so – I felt so terrible for him" (346-347).

She also offered her perspective on what she values in a class experience, as well as a suggestion about how small changes in instructors' perspectives or approaches can make a considerable difference in students' learning and engagement:

...so the last class I was in, it was a humanities class. The class time was purely the instructor standing up there and talking. Nothing else happened at all. He was interesting; he was a good guy. But most of us come from work, and by the end of the day we're struggling to stay

awake. I think that a little bit more communication between everybody – it doesn't necessarily need to be group work, but open the class up to some sort of discussion about something. I think part of the beauty of this type of class – or this type of learning – is you kind of co-teach a little bit. Somebody else has a different view than you have. Makes you see other people's views. And that type of class is really awesome for seeing other people's views on humanity. (064-065)

While expressing similar enthusiasm for St. Clare's instructors and courses, especially her writing instructor, Odette also observed that instructors may be overburdened:

I think the instructors have all been excellent, I remember all of my instructors were overwhelmed by the...classes they were dealing with. Every single one of them. They didn't know if they were coming or going half the time. B was really the only one that seemed to really have a handle on it. The rest of them, I think, have all been really overwhelmed. I don't know if there's not enough instructors, or classes, or what...(Odette, 319)

This perspective suggests that she, along with her peer participants, sought to contextualize instructors' personal and academic lives as adults as possible contributing factors in the disconnect between student and instructor participation. Interestingly, Odette identified that she felt more disconnected from St. Clare than she did at a regional community college in terms of the latter's dedicated resources for adult learners, a highly engaged dean, and informed advisors. However, she also reiterated that "the biggest strength of St. Clare is the teachers. I think they've got really good instructors. I think that carries them a lot. They've got different quirks and personalities, but they're all excellent. I think that really is an important feather in their cap. They can get a lot of things right" (Odette, 387).

Tony offered a different perspective on negotiating instructor and class dynamics, noting that he sometimes self-censoring questions in class and feels "freer" to ask his wife or friends. He shared, "I don't want to offend the instructor by saying, 'Hey, I didn't understand what you said.' Or maybe, 'Hey, I don't agree with what you said'" (Tony, 279). He also indicated that some of

this self-censorship affected his course selection, due to his doubts about how St. Clare advisors approached his request for course planning assistance: “I would like to know now – you know – what my schedule is. Versus now where I have to ask, and I ask, ‘What can I fill in?’ ‘Oh, we’ll worry about that when we get to that.’ I’m like, ‘I need to know now (taps table).’ So I like to know now. I’d rather not procrastinate and wait” (Tony, 070-071). He cited a specific example of the religion course he took that he subsequently found out was not required for his degree: “I didn’t ask; I just saw everyone [his cohort] was going into that one, so I took it. (laughs) I figured I’d rather go with everybody and belong. Just because I know their working style. I know how they would be in the room” (Tony, 290). Like Elyse and Odette, he also observed that his challenges with teaching and advising at St. Clare may be part of a more systematic or pervasive problem. For example, when discussing his inability to obtain timely course planning information, he noted “...from what I hear, it’s not just me. But I have witnessed it” (Tony, 079-083).

While he consistently expressed his preference for active engagement in class conversations, including exchanging differences of opinion, he also expressed reservations about the value of religion or humanities classes to his business management degree program. In other discussions about his religion class, he mentioned that the instructor was more interested in their own opinion and beliefs than drawing out everyone else’s, and instead “strictly went PowerPoint. PowerPoint, PowerPoint, PowerPoint. Not so much of us interacting” (Tony, 005). In contrast, he emphasized the positive experience he had in the introductory Self-Leadership class (which Elyse and Yara also indicated that they took), in large part due to the instructor’s highly interactive style, willingness to engage different questions and perspectives, and willingness to spend time before and after class talking with students.

He also noted this instructor's willingness to extend time throughout the week to talk to students via phone if questions arose after a class session. Noting that not all instructors spend that kind of time with students, he contrasted his prior community college experience and expectations with his current St. Clare experience. When discussing the kind of advice he would share with the institution if he could, "I would say more one-on-one attention. Or more – just more attention, more follow up. Not that I want to be babied. But just, it's not – let me put it this way. I would expect to be treated this way at [community college]. For what I'm paying for [St. Clare], I would expect more being like, 'Hey, this is what we can do for you. We're going to make this work.' I just never had a problem [at community college]. I had a question, they'd call me back. I needed to contact the instructor, they'd call me back...(laughs) but [Self-Leadership instructor] would always call me back" (Tony, 321-323).

In contrast, Yara drew an interesting parallel between the open communication she fosters with her children and the open communication she values with St. Clare advisors:

The advisors here, I can talk to them like I'm talking to you. I don't know if everybody has that rapport, but I develop that rapport from the jump. I knew these were people I was going to have to interact with, for the next essentially year and a half, two years of my life. With that being said, I'd rather we start off from the jump on an open communication level. In my house, I'm very big on open communication. My children and their friends can come to me with anything, and I don't flip out. We discuss it. If it's something major, I step back like I'm looking at a paper and come back. So that's kinda my approach to any problem is like, let's get the meat and potatoes, step back and figure out what we're gonna complement those with. (Yara, 266-267)

Yara's example demonstrates the value she places on the type or quality, not just the function, of advisor relationships. She also further explained what she sees as her active role in constructing those relationships:

So, yeah, I'm – right now I'm extremely pleased with how available they are with – and not just the instructors, but the advisors. And everyone else with this facility really seem to be a common goal, of helping the students excel...I think it's not just their reply, but

how a question is worded. And I'm learning to word my questions a little differently. You can be asking what color is that apple, and ask it six different ways. Is that a bright red apple? Would you consider that dull? So I mean, if you want a specific answer, you have to ask a specific question. I think the broader the question is, the broader the answer is. So I'm learning, depending on what information I'm seeking, kind of how to tweak the question that I ask. (Yara, 094-098)

About half of the St. Clare students, including Yara, expressed an overall positive experience with the advisors. Those who expressed critical views typically distinguished positive interpersonal interactions as different from satisfaction with the timeliness or correctness of advising information. While this study's small sample size does not permit conjecture on how representative the expressed views are, within this sample the mix of perspectives are noteworthy for their consistent affirmation of advising's significance and implications for students' academic planning, experience, and progress.

Again, these examples are reflective of students' emphasis on instructor strengths, even when the feedback or teaching styles did not align with student expectations, preferences, or needs. More broadly, students situated their dissatisfactions and disappointments in relation to the possible complications inflecting practitioners' lives, choosing to emphasize positive encounters and experiences and to learn what they could through the challenging ones.

Students' Self-Conceptualization of Intersecting Identities, Perspectives, Values, and Experiences

Finally, in the course of reflecting on the dimensions of their learning practices, choices, and influences, students also conceptualized their identities as intertwined with their perspectives and growth as learners. Yara highlighted her role as single parent in relation, rather than in opposition, to her identity and choices as a student:

I would say that I am a single mother with four children. One of them who is starting to review the college process himself. Another one whose just recently decided school's

important and actually thinks college might be something she would want to do one day, which was not even six months ago. So yeah, I think first and foremost I'm a mother. And my being a student, I think, is encouraging my children to be a better student. (032-033)

She included her children's' lifelong learning in and about school as part of her paradigm for situating learning at the center of her multiple identities and commitments. Expressing initial concern about her age in relation to becoming a college student at St. Clare, Elyse offered a different perspective on how she situates her roles as a mother and wife in relation to her role as a student:

I really like it. I was nervous at first because I was like, "I'm going to be the oldest person." No, I'm not even close to being the old[est]...And I like it because it's four hours out of the week where I'm not somebody's mom, I'm not somebody's wife. I just get to – I have a different set of friends here. I really like it. It's really just easygoing here, and I really like the professors that I've had. (Elyse, 035-038)

While claiming the space of the classroom as separate from her other roles and commitment, Elyse reflected a sense of interplay, in which she creates meaning in and across varied domains of learning communities, relationships, and conceptualizations of self (Alfred, 2002b; Bartlett, 2007).

Elyse also described her learning stance in relation to challenges and fears:

I feel like I want my strength to be presenting. It's not. I don't really think it is. I'm very nervous about doing that. I think my strengths are putting, researching and doing my papers. 'Cause I can actually—someone's not asking me to produce something regularly; I have time to go back and think about what I want to say, how I want to say it. And I'm very good at that. All my papers are pretty good. I'm pretty proud of those. (057-058)

In affirming her strength as a writer, she contextualized this strength as both a function of specific assignment conditions and as an entry point for her to build and focus on weaker areas. She thus illustrated an orientation toward continuous improvement and embracing anxiety and difficulty as

central to her learning goals. Faith also discussed improvement as a reflection of a linked personal and academic mission:

I have a goal to always keep improving. That kind of comes out in my schoolwork as well. I guess I kind of see things and I say, 'I know this is acceptable work; I can do a little better though. Maybe I should do that if I have time.' When asked where that goal comes from, Faith explained, "Trials of my past, to be honest. I've dealt with a lot in my life, and I choose to learn from it and grow from it. One of my ways of doing that is finding things that I need to do with my life...I don't know. I don't know. Theories that I have for myself to become better, I guess. (241-245)

Her description suggests an intersectional meaning making process within and across multiple identity, experiential, and discourse contexts.

Odette reflected on her different schooling experiences, tracing her development as a learner and college student. She explains, "School was chaotic when I was in elementary school. I have a lot of sympathy for the kids. I was in a poor neighborhood myself, and I understand. I have a lot of empathy. Because the environment's chaotic. It's hard to learn in those settings. In high school I had – we still had a lot of fire and brimstone instructors that liked to put students on the spot and humiliate students. I rejected that..." (Odette, 115). She identified her high school history instructor as making a difference in her perspectives on education and inspired her love of reading, which she "embraced" despite seeing school as "just school" and starting to work at 14 (Odette, 115-116). She also noted that her academic evolution aligned, however asynchronously, with her parents': "My parents were not academic people; neither one of them went to college...As they got older they got more college minded..." (Odette, 116). She started at a community college and "got nothing out of it" despite being "stimulated" by some of her courses and instructors (Odette, 277). However, she described a conceptual shift that marked her return to college at St. Clare:

...coming back to it now, I've got all this life experience. At first I thought, "Well I'm not going to get anything out of this, and I'm not going to be open minded enough. I'm too set in my ways. Can I be introduced to all this new stuff?" But I think the key to be a master student has a lot to do with treating it like a more fulfilling, richer experience. I think part of that is being open minded enough to listen to people who have a completely different worldview than you. I think I'm just such a different person now. I'm sitting back and I'm taking in all these different perspectives. I think that's part of it; it's such a richer experience...And the only way that you can really get that out of it is by stepping back and embracing the rest of it. Even though this challenging experience I just had, I didn't take anything personally. I'm too old to take anything personally anymore. I've got nothing to prove. I am who I am. But at the same time I walked away going, "Let me reflect on this a little bit. Was there things I could have done differently?" (Odette, 277-280)

As is discussed in more depth in Chapter 6, Odette's narrative suggests complex construction of the domain of the personal (Alfred, 2002b). It demonstrated both a reflexive engagement with her personal biases and an open-minded stance toward people with "completely different world view," a project which she suggested is enabled by disaggregating or postponing her personalized response to those encounters for later reflection (Biesta & Tedder, 1997; Schön, 1983).

Yara also prioritized the role of openness and difference to her conceptualization of learning, adding emphasis on situating learning within cultural and historical contexts as well:

I think it is being open to new experiences. Being open to new knowledge. Being open to others' viewpoints. Because I think we can learn a lot from how others view things. Even all this stuff going down in Fergusson right now. It's a huge learning. And even though it takes us back 40, 50 years to the times of Dr. King, a lot of these kids never thought learning that piece of history was pertinent to them. And now it's in their face. So I think learning is just really knowing where you came from in order to see where you're going to go. (046b)

Tony also reflected, as did Yara, on cultural contexts for and instantiations of learning, with emphasis on his sense of responsibility to opening his learning and his workplace to engaging with and supporting multiple identities and groups. In describing his perspective on learning as "gathering data and...translating it into making the right choices," Tony also situated his

conceptualization of the right or “well-decided choices” as necessarily engaged with the impacts of his choices on other people, now and in the future (150):

Don’t learn not to – just be open to everything. Not leave yourself in a little box; sheltered. I know a few people that I work with over here. Since I’m in the Hispanic forum I have to go to their meetings. I don’t have to go, but I go. And I mentioned one time I went to a gay and lesbian meeting – they’re together; it’s all diversity groups. I show up and I’m there, and the guy was like, “Why would you want to go?” Why not? Just think about it. It’s not worse – they’re people. Everybody’s, you know – just make a better choice, I guess. (Tony, 151-154)

Tony described how making those conscious choices at work related to the choices he made in the questions he asked and the projects he completed in class. When discussing a group project on diversity, Tony shared, “I saw some people were kind of like, “Whatever. We hear about this all the time.” But – I think it’s important. I like it. (pause) I don’t think of things the same way somebody else does. They may not think of it the same way I do. And if you want to succeed in a global market, you need to realize, “Hey, you’re not just working with your people; you’re working with everybody. You need to be accepting of everyone. You need to be conscious of what’s going on.” And I like the concept of everybody eats. Everybody’s going to – I’m here, we’re all going to make money. We’re all here to succeed. Just because you’re from where you’re at, I don’t think it’s right that you shouldn’t succeed” (Tony, 258-259). He demonstrated a sense of individual and collective responsibility to advancing a pluralistic, multicultural perspective, and situated himself and his peers within global cultural contexts in which dominant American perspectives are decentered (Alfred, 2002; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Harper, 2012). He also expressed a sense of collective, democratic learning in which relational heritage and ties are encompassed, informing practices and choices in and out of school (Biesta & Tedder, 1997; Brookfield & Holst, 2011).

It is worth noting that all St. Clare University students interviewed earned high grades in their courses and would be considered “successful” in terms of achievement and outcomes. As noted in

the Methodology chapter, this shared characteristic may contribute a self-selection bias for participation in this study. However, it is also significant to take account of in the findings, particularly in light of the intersections across the findings' dominant themes. All students are overcommitted in their personal and professional lives, are dedicating significant time and financial resources to attending college, and in fact took extra time from their already-hectic schedules to participate in these interviews. Yet rather than identifying their successful grades as an end point, each student identified their weaknesses, challenges, and/or opportunities from which they sought to advance their individual skills and broader learning. They articulated a desire for more critical feedback from instructors, a desire to practice skills or projects that they feel anxiety about, a desire to learn with and from others inside and out of class, and a deeply reflective approach to linking their personal and academic lives—not just to contextualize specific academic practices or topics, but also to expand the ways in which they conceptualize their identities, growth, and goals (Alfred, 2002b; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, MISSION UNIVERSITY

Institutional Profile

Mission University is an adult-serving branch campus of a nonprofit, private, Christian-affiliated university. It offers evening classes exclusively to adult undergraduates pursuing baccalaureate degrees in business, human services, communications, education, and psychology. The institution's main residential campus and three additional adult-serving branch campuses are located in the Southwest; two additional adult-serving campuses are located in other Midwestern states. Mission University's participating study site has the largest adult student population among the institution's branch campuses and is the only one located within this study's Midwestern state. It also represents the highest proportion of adult undergraduates in this study's state.

Mission University's participating study branch is located in a different part of the executive office park in which St. Clare University's participating study branch is located, and it shares a corporate building with three other businesses. It appears newer and better maintained than St. Clare's building, with more overhead lighting, modern furniture, and brighter walls and carpet. It features 14 classrooms, eight on the main floor and six on the second floor, which is accessible by campus ID card scanning elevators. There is a staffed reception area at the front of the building, furnished with chairs, a coffee table, glass cases with campus memorabilia, a table with campus pamphlets, flyers, and registration forms, and a flat screen monitor featuring class schedules and campus news. An un-staffed side entrance reception area features four overstuffed chairs and two glass tables with additional campus pamphlets. There is a Writing Center and Math Center, both of which contain long tables and desktop computers. There is also a computer lab and one cafeteria-style common area equipped with counters for a coffee maker, tea, and

snacks, plus two vending machines. The upper floor is smaller and un-staffed; in addition to the classrooms, it contains a few cubicle areas for students to work and an open area with chairs and a small coffee table.

The campus is staffed by 11 full-time administrators. The Writing Center and Math Center are staffed on a limited part-time basis by adjunct instructors. The following staff and faculty members participated in supplementary interviews: Andrew, the lead campus executive; Nancy, the associate provost and dean of instruction; Valerie, the lead instructor and director of a combined bachelor's and master's degree program; Violet, the faculty coordinator; Naomi, the senior financial advisor; Fred, the business manager; Renata, an advisor who also teaches, and the following adjunct instructors: Renee, Rebecca, Rae, Octavia, Olga, Irene, Ian, Floyd, and Edward. Renee and Irene also serve as writing tutors.

Student Participants

Demographic information was not collected from students. Instead, interviews privileged an experiential and reflective discussion context, in which disclosure of personal information, such as background and associated details, was wholly optional. Mission University's participant sample was drawn from a predominantly white campus population. Four students self-identified as people of color, which is noted.

- Ella is a white student who just completed the last course for a bachelor's degree in human development and family studies.
- Gina, a student who described growing up in Congo and starting college in Kenya before coming to the US for college, is pursuing a bachelor's degree in business management.
- Grace is a white student who is pursuing a bachelor's degree in human services.
- Hannah is a white student who just completed the last course for a bachelor's degree in business administration and is pursuing the final two courses for an adult learning minor.
- Ingrid is a white student who is pursuing a bachelor's degree in business management.
- Kira is from Brazil, and at the time of this study was preparing to move back after having just completed her last course for a bachelor's degree in business management. She made time to participate in two Skype interviews from home while she packed.

- Paula identified as a Black student and is pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology.
- Penelope identified as an Asian student and is pursuing a bachelor's degree in accounting.

Primary Learning Theme 1: Practices, Styles, and Approaches

Reading

Ingrid talked about reading in relation to classes she found especially challenging, like statistics and economics, noting that she would often reread “probably about 500 times. Sometimes I’ll literally take my finger one word at a time” (115). She focused her reading through a detailed note-taking process:

I take notes and I highlight. I’m a big highlighter. I’m a big dog ear pages. I will post-it note. I will write the subject comparative advantage, and I’ll put a post-it note. I have stuff like this. So I use it as a bookmark. I have lots of stuff on my table. I’m a big go back and forth. So when I’m doing the reading, or doing the problem, I use the back of the book for the glossary. For the definition of the word. And then I’ll go back to the application used in the book. So I do a lot of back and forth reading it over, and over and over again. And if I still need clarification, I will Google it. Get other people’s thoughts on the same subject. (Ingrid 120-121)

She described a similarly methodical reading and writing process, which is addressed in the following subsection.

Writing

Penelope discussed how her writing class, including its in person format, helped her understand academic writing conventions, and how she adapted her conceptualization and approach to writing as a result:

“He told us to write something that you would like about. Because basically he said he’s looking at how we’re writing; what we’re doing...back into college mode. Yes...Because that was our first class. He was trying to relate it that we need to change our styles. That’s what – and one of the guys in our class, he often wrote about – because he was a musical person. He often – we would always talk about our essays out loud too. He would write – he’s like, “You know, I’m writing about songs. It’s different from our education.” That’s what he realized;

that he needs to take a step back. He was writing like how he was talking. That's what I was doing. ... I got to realize what – if I was in online courses, I would never have gotten that. I would have thought maybe I can write it like as I'm talking...I have a habit of that. Especially in email. You're writing, can you please take a look at this? As in writing, you're not – it's different...That's why – yes – my thinking had to change. That's where I realized, okay, who is my audience? Who am I writing about? That's what he made me realize. Because it's been a while, coming back in education" (125-129).

Penelope described her process of thinking through her learning about academic writing as a way of constructing a narrative about how she goes about her writing assignments (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). She also identified her instructor's role as a critical one in elucidating academic writing conventions, in which he took up issues of genre, context, and personal identification with and purposes for different writing styles (Lea & Street, 2006).

Ella offered a different perspective on her writing process, emphasizing her dislike of steps like outlining that don't align with her sense of her writing assignments' broader goals:

I don't like to do outlines. Don't make me do an outline. I feel like if I'm doing an outline I have essentially written the paper. I can't do an outline. Because for me when I– M was the same way. I pick a topic and I read the research. And from there, that's how I figure out my paper. So doing the outline, I can't just give you little tiny weird sketches of what my paper's going to be. I can't give you an introduction, or a thesis, or – well actually the thesis, that I guess I could. Because that's essentially what your whole paper's about. But I never write the intro or the conclusion until the end of the paper. Ever. Because I've written on it. It's like now how can I draw the crowd in? What do I need to put in this intro? How's my paper set up? You have to align that. How was the research done? You have to align that. If you just start writing on the context prior to the introduction, it just helps you build a better introduction, in my opinion. (Ella, 232)

It may be suggested that the research process that Ella described, in which she described reading toward “figure[ing] out my paper,” functions as an organizing process like an outline, through which she builds her papers. Her discussion of different paper components, including her perspectives on the affordances of writing her conclusions and introductions last, is suggestive of an understanding of academic writing conventions that coexists with the ways in which she

understood and chose to forgo outlines in her writing processes (Lea & Street, 2006). On the other hand, Kira emphasized the role of outlines in her writing process:

I take notes. I always make an outline. Not formal. Just a sketch. And I place it on the wall right behind my monitor so I can keep looking at it and don't lose the focus. I write the body of the paper first. Follow the outline. Sometimes even have to change the outline. But I also tend to do the reference list first. Because that's something that is very time consuming, and energy consuming to me. And I do not enjoy it. ...if I did it first as I write the paper, I already have the reference information to cite. And at the end I don't need to work with that. Because at the end of the project, you are tired. So that's my technique. So I write it down, follow the outline. Once I'm done, I read all – I rewrite the conclusion first, and then I go back. (082-085)

Her description of how she prioritizes hard or disliked tasks such as compiling references pages, to get them out of the way, illustrates the value she finds in assigning and organizing writing tasks. She also highlighted the role of enjoyment, or the lack thereof, in defining, sequencing and focusing her writing process.

Grace talked about her dislike of writing as a factor in her college enrollment decision-making and timing.

When I went to tech school, we really didn't write a lot of papers. And I was always told, going through your bachelor's degree, it's a lot of writing. And that, I have to say, I'll be honest, I didn't really want to write papers....And I think that was the biggest deterrent for me to come back to school for as long as it did. It's not bad. I'm realizing it's not that bad. I've been told by some instructors I'm a good writer. I'm sure I'm not perfect by any means. But it just makes you realize, going back to school, strengths that you never realized you had. Because I've never really had to utilize those skills. So on my job, yes, I write documentation and emails, and stuff like that. But it's not like a formal paper that you have to do. (Grace, 033-036)

In this reflection, Grace also identified the roles and limitations of her writing contexts outside the classroom, and their influence on her comfort level and expectations in relation to academic writing (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Lea & Street, 2006).

Research

Ella described her process of learning about what a college research paper entails, emphasizing that she didn't have specific guidance until her final class:

So then how can any of the thoughts be your own? You do the research; you read about it. Where did you get the information that you now know? From everything that you just read. In my mind a research paper is a collection of different people's works put together in a systematic way in a paper. Then the day I would, say, write on a topic – well how can I write on it? I got this – I didn't come up with this information. I read it. A lot of my papers are just that. Then I was reading, looking into those scholarly journals. Right? Did you not notice that every quote is a quote by somebody? It's all referenced in there. It made me realize, that is what a research paper is. Because I was sitting here thinking I had to come up with 12 pages of my own information. And nobody told me that. I had to figure that out. (205-206)

In her reflection, she raised interesting questions about the tacit conventions and expectations embedded in concepts like ownership of ideas and evidence in academic research contexts. She also addressed the complicated intersections between learning about a task or assignment and conducting and learning through it (Bartlett, 2007; Lea & Street, 2006)

Gina also talked about research, with a different emphasis on the topics and assignments that motivated and informed her process:

Especially when I'm talking about social problems, or talking about real life situations. I really like going in depth...through researches. Maybe if we're given, have to present on this topic or do this thing. So I'll make sure, maybe, I'll then have to find – if it PowerPoints, videos supporting my topic. I'll have to do that. Yeah. I really love researching... we have this library that we use online. I don't really – okay, I use some of them. But I use more in Google. I use books. I use videos. I search for videos that can – especially for presentations. As I present I would start with my introduction, and the support it with videos, and explain more; taking the knowledge that we got from the books and the one that instructor gave to us, and then combine them together and give to the class and explain everything. Yeah. I like making an appropriate presentation; appropriate research paper...Having deep thoughts inside...Before I used to be very shy. But when I got here most of the class – actually, all of the classes we've been having presentations. It's really boosted my ways of doing it. I've really improved...being critical thinkers. So it's very, very, very important to us. (072-079)

She illustrated a highly intertwined conceptualization of research purposes, like social problems, research processes, and co-mingled research and learning goals, in which her development of appropriately thoughtful and substantiated presentations links with her public speaking and critical thinking experiences (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Schön, 1983). Gina also highlighted the roles of engagement with and connection to her research assignments, noting that she loves the process of research and the learning she gains from facilitating, supporting, and presenting it.

Ingrid emphasized her utilization of online library resources when describing her research paper process:

I used EBSCOhost for a lot for that. I printed out I would say probably 70 different papers. And it was nice because we had different stages. We had to do a proposal. So I had to make a decision on what I was going to write on. So I made the decision, and then there was the proposal. It was really nice because she broke it down very nicely. And she knew most, this was the first class anybody took when they started [Mission University]. So the planning, she kind of did the planning for us. And broke it down into the proposal and the outline. Then she wanted your references. So that kind of made me narrow things down. (130-131)

She linked this sequencing and narrowing of her research topics to her writing process:

And then I started writing. I – instead of typing, I actually wrote it out...And then I would type it. And I had my topic areas. And I kind of do it a little different. I would jump around. I get distracted, sometimes, easily. So when I get too hung up on one area I would just set it aside and go read onto the next area...Because I can read and then write at the same time. It's just – I don't know. I just, taking notes in my mind, it works better. And then when I go to type it, more ideas come to mind. And then when I put it away and go back to it, I can rewrite it and, "No, this will sound better." I'm much better at editing than first – I have a hard time coming up with fresh ideas. Writing a paper kills me. It really does. That seems to be the hardest point, is starting it. (Ingrid, 131-135)

As with Ella and Kira, Ingrid also talked about how dislike figures into her writing process decisions. She highlighted the kind of negotiations across task, sequence, and process she takes up in acknowledgement of her dislikes and perceived weaknesses. In doing so, she clarified how

and why she adapted her writing process, with emphasis on her revision and editing phases, to improve her flow of ideas, focus, and clarity.

Ingrid indicated her preference for PDF articles and sources like Harvard Review to support her research and writing, noting that she doesn't like the general internet searches for research because she prefers the process of "find[ing] the answer that makes sense to me, I guess" (Ingrid, 123). Gina, Kira, and Ella also talked about relying on a variety of research resources, ranging from library books and articles to general Google searches. In particular, Gina mentioned her use of documentary and personal videos, such as are uploaded to YouTube, which she values as illustrative of the personal dimensions of topics like bullying. Kira also noted that YouTube videos offer "information with the visuals" (081) that are important to her learning.

Group Work/Collaborative Learning

Another distinguishing finding among Mission University's participant concerns group work. Mission does not require formal group projects as does St. Clare. Consequently, Mission students expressed more consistently positive experiences with and a desire for more group work, citing the benefits of classmate perspectives and interactive discussion on their learning. Hannah described a small group as "key" (105). She also expressed appreciation of "personable" instructors and the major contributions they make to her learning, recalling one she loved "for his sense of humor. But he also taught a subject I love...It's really—for me it's the small learning. The small classes. Small rooms. The PowerPoint presentations, the amount of homework, the explanations that I get from the teachers. So I guess that wraps up into the instructor themselves; their content, their presenting, and the personality that they bring to the table" (Hannah, 105-106).

Grace also noted the importance of instructor teaching style and communication to her learning. In addition, she emphasized the importance of peer perspectives to her learning in class:

“There’s a lot of class time. We barely – we’ll go over reviews of the reading and stuff that’s due, but really I’m learning a lot from the discussion. PowerPoint; if the instructor’s going over the PowerPoint. We feel comfortable to ask questions about it. And just say, “What does that mean?” That’s pretty much how our class time has been in all the classes, pretty much, that I’ve been here. It’s always been a lot of discussion. It’s never lecture, where the instructor is just talking and then you’re like, “Oh my god, it’s only 7 o’clock and I have two more hours.” I’ve never felt that way at all. It’s a really neat...” (Grace, 051)

Gina shared Grace’s enthusiasm for interactive classes, expressing that they make the time fly for her and that she’s not ready to leave when classes end. She also shared another perspective on class time, particularly her consideration of if and how to participate in class:

Actually, if I don’t have any question I just say I don’t have any answer right now....pass it first and I will think about it. If I find the answer, I just think about some – I don’t know. I’m just someone that (snaps) I’ll just find something to say. Yeah. That’s how I am. I’ll just find something [inaudible 00:42:24]. Mostly I’ll think about what people, other people, were not expecting to hear....But I wouldn’t maybe know specific questions. But most of the classes I’ve attended, I know I would always say – and this lecturer ... “You always say things that we don’t expect.” I don’t know. Maybe I view things different. Or I don’t know; because I come from a different background, maybe I have this different perspective, maybe? Compared to someone who has just lived in the United States. I might bring something that is maybe different from what they have known here. I have different background because I’ve lived in two different countries; two different settings. And here, also, this is my third country. Maybe I will bring something that is more different than anyone else. (190-193)

Gina’s reflection illustrates the interest, depth, and thoughtfulness she brings to her classes. It also highlights perspectives that can be marginalized in classrooms when "difference" is not accounted for, or, on the other hand, when linguistic or cultural differences are undervalued or resisted by white students, as Tony discussed in relation to his diversity project (Alfred, 2002; Harper, 2012). Gina also identified here and elsewhere throughout her interview that her primary criterion for contributing in class is whether or not she felt she can contribute something useful that her peers or instructor have not said or may benefit from. She demonstrated a sense of responsibility and reciprocity toward her classmates, as well as to the collaborative learning co-constructed in each class. In so doing, she demonstrated willingness to engage in extra intellectual and emotional

labor on behalf of the class's learning as well as hers. Further, her response also illustrated the simultaneous pressures, reduced expectations, yet higher bar that students of color and international students face within when attending predominantly white institutions (Harper, 2012, 2013).

Primary Learning Theme 2: Learning Perspectives, Attitudes, and Beliefs

Students reflected on ways in which their learning perspectives shifted over time. They also discussed the role of different perspectives in challenging and influencing their learning, including how their multiple lives and identities lent purpose to their learning. When discussing their strengths, they also consistently framed them in relation to what those strengths enable them to learn or what they reflect about their learning commitments. For instance, Faith shared, "I'm a good thinker, I think. When it comes to thinking, I can really generate ideas. But when it comes to math...But I think just giving the best of me. That's my strength" (Faith, 068-069). Throughout her interview, her strong grades were mentioned, but her emphasis here, as elsewhere, is on her learning stance and commitments more than the learning validation of her As.

Gina talked more about the function of recognizing learning strengths. She also explained her perspectives on the variance across learner strengths and on out of class contexts and spaces for learning:

Even if you don't know anything to say in class, at least getting what everyone is saying. We don't get everything in class at once. We all learn maybe after class. Yeah. I don't think that – learning process, it depends from one person to another. Some people get to understand everything faster. I'm also very slow in learning when it comes to accounting or other courses. When others are really getting the answer I'm still there... You know? It doesn't mean that – you know, it depends. It depends. Each one must know their strengths and weaknesses that they have. I think if you know that my strength is in these other courses, then of course you may find weaknesses in other courses too. Just try to balance.... (Gina, 213)

Also part of Gina's reflection is another extension of her sense of responsibility and commitment to her peers, exemplified by the advice-oriented framework in which she situated what she describes as her own weaknesses, along with how she viewed the role of class time and participation in helping develop them.

Hannah shared her perspectives on how generational factors influence peoples' positionalities, interactions, and attitudes:

You really – you don't have to change who you are, but you have to know who the person you're talking to or doing business with is, so you don't overstep your boundaries. Because there are still those boundaries. Stay within who you are so they can stay comfortable with who they are. And I don't think everybody understands that. They think, "Well this is who I am; just deal with it." In the professional world you can't really be like that. You can be who you are, but you need to be professional about it too. And you can't make people uncomfortable with who they are, because you don't want to be uncomfortable with who you are. So if you don't want them to do it to you, why would you do it to them? So the whole thing fascinates me because there are so many different generations of personality in the workplace now. We really do need to understand how each one goes about their professional career. Every generation and person is different. ...Even though we sort of fit in the same mold sometimes...it just helps to understand that. At least know that you have to kind of step back and listen to somebody and kind of get to know who they are before you can judge."
(Hannah, 187-189)

She framed her positionalities at work as a function of situating her sense of self in relation to others. She also expressed openness to their different perspectives and emphasis on creating similarly open lines of communication.

Ella offered her perspective on how her attitudes toward college and learning have shifted over time:

That's how I learn. So I sit in class, I hear it. I see it on the board. I go home, I write about it. And then do it is my projects throughout the class. Or put it into life lessons; I don't know. But for me as a learner, that's how I learn....it changed with age. I was 18 when I went to college. I can tell you, college was not the first thing on my mind. Class was not – class was class, and life was more important. So while I had studies to do I was like, "Woah." Now flip it. As an adult learner it's like, "I have to miss the Packer game because I have this paper to write. I can't come out with you because I have this

assignment due.” Whereas before it’s like, “I got four hours in the morning to do it; we’re good.” You know? (113-116)

In describing this shift, she highlighted the importance and trade-offs of prioritizing college, including how she sees it as part of her life instead of a separate domain. Grace also talked about a similar shift, emphasizing her adherence to instructor directions and expectations as an extension of her commitment to college:

I feel like I’m going back to school for a reason. I’m just not saying that I’m getting a piece of paper. I’m here because I want to work. And so I do all the assignments. My sister and I just talked about that this past weekend. She said, “You know it’s sad, because you buy all these books. And if you don’t use what you – you don’t retain anything.” And I said, “But I still want to read everything. I still want to learn.” So for me, in that respect, I want to do everything that the instructors are giving me because they know. They’ve been in the field; they know what they’re doing. So me as a learner, I really feel like I need to do what they’re asking me to do. So I think a strength is definitely that. Just doing what you’re told, basically. (042-044)

She characterized her adherence as a strength, assigning value to instructors’ knowledge of course topics as well as how to foster academic literacies and skills. She also expresses an investment in both the time and materials that college requires, with interest in pushing her reading and learning beyond her assignments.

In this section’s final example, Ingrid recounted her attempts to use what she described as a “clumsy” Java Whiteboard-based student tutoring system to assist with algebra problems. In doing so explained the kind of help she sought from the tutors: “So when I was figuring out one of [Edward’s] problems, I went on there. And I just wanted to know if I was on the right page. I didn’t want to know, I didn’t want the answer. But either yes, my thinking is on the right path, or I’m totally in left field” (Ingrid, 049). Despite identifying her anxiety about math throughout her interviews, as well as describing her lengthy math homework sessions, this example demonstrates Ingrid’s determination to avoid shortcuts and to work through problems for herself.

Primary Learning Influences

Role of Peers, Family, and Colleagues

In contrast with St. Clare University's overwhelmingly positive reflections on the people in their personal lives who have influenced their learning along the way, both in and out of school, four out of seven Mission students highlighted the complications and challenges of personal relationships. They emphasized how even painful experiences informed their learning perspectives and practices.

In terms of participants' positive experiences, Penelope stands out as one student who described the benefits of sharing writing with her husband and family members, especially at times when the Writing Center was not open:

I was doing my homework while I was in the airplane...I was like, "Oh my gosh." But then – and I like to go to the Writing Center...It was the first class, and usually those are not open; the Writing Center's not open. So I'm like, "Oh my gosh." And you know what? My husband knows how I am. My husband's like, "I know. You need someone else to reread it, and proofread yours." I'm like, "Yes. I just wanted to make sure this assignment, this is what it – if you understood just from reading my assignment." That's it. That you understood. Because he's not the professor; he's not coming in. Or I give it to someone else in my family and say, "Can you just read it? See if you understood?" I don't want them to come back to, "What was this about?" Someone could actually just pick it up, read it, understand it. Yes. I was like, "Okay." What I did was right when I left, I was working on the assignment. I emailed it to him. I was like, "Can you please just read it? See if you understand it? What's your feedback on it?" So he's like, "Okay, it's good. Maybe you want to think about this. I don't understand this, and so maybe you need to elaborate more." I'm like, "Okay, thank you." Yes. (176-179)

In this description, she also illustrated her dedication to keeping up with her writing assignments even while traveling. In contrast, Grace explained the impact of negotiating a new marriage with her academic responsibilities and time commitments:

I have to just say that I stuck it through. Even though it was very tough for me in the beginning with writing and that. I think I'm just most proud of that I stuck it through. There's been a couple times along the way where I'm just like, "Why am I doing this? I have it good where I'm at. Why do I really —" But then again, I could have a bad day the next day and it's like, "This is why. You're not happy with what you're doing." So so many times—I know after I recently got married too, it was very hard for me. My husband hasn't been the most supportive with me going to school. Just because he wants me home. We're newlyweds, and he wants to have his wife home. Poor guy doesn't see me already on Saturday all day. Then I'm gone two nights a week. I'm tired. I'm cranky. I wouldn't want to put up with me either. But I keep reminding him that it's temporary. So I basically sat down with him and just said, "This isn't as easy for me as what you think it is right now. It's very hard for me to juggle all of this. But then with you not really being there for me 100% of the way is not helping either." So we've now come to an understanding. He's been more helpful with things at home and everything. That's another thing too, I guess, for advice for students. Is that you really need to talk to your partner about it, because it is time consuming. Either they're going to support you or they're not, but you have to stick to your goal, as to what you want. (110-111)

She illustrated the pressures, stresses, and complexities of having to work through marital expectations and dynamics, especially in a new marriage, at the same time she was learning to navigate new academic conventions, expectations, and demands. She also emphasized her commitment to prioritizing her academic goals amidst the pressures, even if it meant pursuing them without the support of her husband. Reflecting on the magnitude of this endeavor, she extended her reflection with advice to students who may find themselves in similarly challenging circumstances.

Hannah also talked about the influence of difficult relationships, noting elsewhere that this was an ongoing struggle for her, made more complicated by managing infant care, work, and school at the same time. However, she emphasized how these experiences shaped and strengthened her as a learner:

And I had come off two not so great marriages. So I was kind of anti-marriage...[this] help you in foreseeing, like, you get to know me on an educational level, and as an adult learner, and as a professional. But I sometimes think people's backgrounds define a lot of that, too. Generations and generational background, and your age. And your gender. And your life experiences also kind of mold who you are and how you learn...And how you retain, and how you learn from your mistakes." (Hannah, 157-160)

Here as elsewhere, she emphasized the multiplicity of intersecting factors influencing her learning as well as others', with attention to the role that generational contexts play (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). It is also noteworthy that throughout this discussion, she expressed her willingness to disclose challenging information as a way of helping me understanding her contexts as a college student. When I asked if she wanted to discontinue our audio recording during this part of the conversation, she deferred to me. Due to the deeply personal and identifiable nature of what she delved into, I made a decision to decline recording the most sensitive material, prioritizing her participant privacy and confidentiality.

Paula delved into how her experience with an abusive spouse influenced her decision to study psychology in college:

I've always been interested in psychology. And as I've gotten older, just – just the relationship from my childhood; the things that I've experienced growing up, and people I've come in contact with. And the fact that my ex-husband was – I had married someone that was abusive. And I'm like, "What makes people make the decisions that they make, and their behavior, and so forth, so on?" Including myself. I'm very curious about how people make their decisions as far as their child rearing, to any mental illness, anything [inaudible 00:04:47] physiologically and psychologically. I just want to help people. Not just talking to them to find out the root of their problem, but also their spiritual side as well. Just to help them to be well rounded, and resolve any issues that they have. (026-027)

In her reflection, she emphasized how processing her painful experiences aligned with her interest in examining people's behaviors, motivations, and actions from a psychological vantage point. She also reflected on how her own experiences helped inform her commitment to helping others. She expressed a willingness to make her experience and choices transparent as a way of helping others, as she chose to in this interview with others, as a way of modeling what she conceptualizes as a "well rounded" embrace of the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of experience (Alfred, 2002b).

Ingrid shared examples of how both painful and supportive relationships have played a role in her education. In particular, she connected the development of her critical thinking awareness with her navigation of an abusive relationship:

I had never heard of critical thinking before. I didn't know what it was. I think we do it on a daily basis when you problem solve. My marriage was really hard; it was real abusive. Struggling with a lot of different things. So critical thinking was thinking on your toes, looking at the bigger picture. What do I need to do? Even if it's not something I want to do, and not something that I can even imagine myself doing. But then you go ahead and figure it out. So that first instructor gave me such good feedback, and she pushed me. She pushed me to do things that I never thought I could do. She encouraged me. So that, she set the premise for my entire education. And made me actually like myself, and that I had self-worth. And so that's how I've grown. I've gained so much self-esteem. That I am smart. And I can do it. I can do whatever I put my mind to. And even if I struggle and cry and scream and struggle with your projects, that's okay; that's just a release, and that's just pushing you to grow. And I didn't realize that before that. The growing pains that you feel are just part of the learning process. (Ingrid, 035-036b)

She described how the development of her confidence and determination also contributed to her opening up to colleagues, as well as her boyfriend, about her assignments: "If it's a subject that I'm okay with – I have teachers in my office. So my job is to take care of them. We'll talk about some of my stuff. And when I have issues and it's a hard class, I'll definitely seek out advice from them...I'll bounce it off my boyfriend. I will read to him and say, "Does this make sense? How does this sound?" (Ingrid, 157). She also laughingly said, "So yes. I spent a lot of time talking to myself," (157) which, in its joking mention, further suggests value that Ingrid placed on self-reflection and dialogue in her learning processes, and the confidence she has gained by taking active control of and maximizing her learning.

Academic Choices and Life Integration/Negotiation

Paula described a confluence of moving and family responsibilities that impeded her ability to stay enrolled in one of her courses. While her family was adjusting to a close relative's

move out of state after getting married, her apartment move-out date was changed to an earlier date:

Long story short, I was like, “I can’t take this class right now.” I can’t put 100% into it, and I just couldn’t do it....But that was the class I was taking right now; physiological psychology. So I just recently dropped it. So I’ll go the next term. Which I think I’ll be more prepared the next term....And I have two children at home and my mother lives with me. And it was just a culmination of everything. It was very much overwhelming.” (Paula, 017).

Amidst her summary of the factors impeding her successful engagement in and completion of the course, Paula emphasized her desire to take the course again, with the benefit of being more prepared.

Penelope highlighted the importance of transferring credits to her decision to attend Mission, noting that if her credits didn’t transfer, she would be paying for two years of college that she already completed:

I’m from California. So when I moved to Wisconsin – and I even, in the community school when I went to, just to see what they would transfer in, they would not transfer any of my regular classes. They would transfer into electives. ...But not my general education. So my two years in California State University, they didn’t transfer anything...Then when I was working [inaudible 00:01:55] someone mentioned about the school that’s just down the street, and said that they transfer majority of theirs into regular general education courses too, as well as your regular major courses. So I thought, “You know what? Maybe I should just try them out.” When I came and met up with one of the counselors she told me – and she told me right away – well, she actually said why don’t she first get my digital transcripts. That’s what she did. She said when I meet up with her she’ll have that all ready to let me know. Because I told her that I wanted to find out what actually transferred. I know it’s been a while, because that was ten years ago. So she actually sat down and said, “Okay, these are going to transfer in.” So I was happy, and I came in. Now I’m junior status, so it’s like all my two years. So I’m happy. (018-025)

Penelope also explained the employment factors in her decision to pursue education as an adult to begin with: “I think one of the main major ones was that I work for a bank, and the bank was recently bought out. My department got our notice shortly after the conversion. Another

department came in and recruited me. I was actually the last one in our department. However, it looks like when I applied for other jobs, people looked a lot on education. That's when I learned that education, I really needed to go back in order to pursue back into accounting. I'm in the loan department, and I really miss accounting. That's why I want to go back, and I want to work back in accounting" (Penelope, 034-035). She described one of the benefits of returning to school as "giving me a refresher. I don't remember some of the classes from that ten years ago" (Penelope, 037).

Further, she noted that her initial decision making about college was influenced by financial resources, in response to which she began by taking as few classes as possible to afford it. Her decision to enroll at Mission required her to take out loans, which she originally tried to avoid. However, she explained that she realized, "...I do need to go back to school. I need to get my degree in order to move up." And so I realized I will need to take that student loan regardless of anything now. And hopefully it will pay back. Yes" (Penelope, 035).

Gina also described the complex considerations of transfer enrollment and credits, made even more challenging by her international educational background. She noted that her academic advisor was helpful in clarifying her requirements and that having left Kenya before completing her original program has both prepared her and left room for her to pursue a double major at Mission. She also described her motivation for selecting a business management bachelor's degree after having originally studied literature in Kenya: "So I think from then I started having this desire of working in business. I also got inspired also to help people back home, and to start my own NGO helping children who are street children; yeah, stuff like that. I want to start NGO and have a profit organization that is going to support, sustain my NGO. Yeah. That's why I'm doing business administration" (Gina, 010-011). Gina drew connections across her cross-cultural educational journey, as well as across her different fields of study, stressing their potential

applications to the complexities of NGO development and management. In doing so, she situated her choices and social action orientation as an adult learner in the context of her multiple identities, commitments, and cultural communities (Alfred, 2002; Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Brookfield & Holst, 2011).

Kira explained that she moved to the US from Brazil specifically to attend college after teaching English in Brazil, expressing that “loved it so much that I realized that I could not just teach English without being in a country that speaks English, and having that abroad – an experience in another country” (Kira, 017). She also explained that she spent her first year and a half in the US taking English courses to improve her academic English writing and speaking skills. She attributed her decision to attend Mission to an unexpected career change. She explained that she was unable to complete a college program in nutrition due to her family’s financial situation, but still wanted to earn a degree. She transitioned to studying business “because it could be more involved with my interests as—combining with the nutrition science, and any other field I may just go through now” (Kira, 008-013). Kira also described the specific characteristics of Mission University that encouraged her to enroll after having completing an associate’s degree at a regional community college:

And after that I decided to earn a bachelor’s degree. And since I was a little homesick, I decided I wanted to go to school where I could graduate a faster way, and that they would accept the credits I had already taken. So Mission...gave emphasis on the work I have done already. And they didn’t want to put me in classes that I’ve taken already, like other schools. So I liked the way that they valued what I’ve done. And they didn’t want to just make money in making me take those classes again. So that was an important factor that I chose Mission. And another one is that I would take classes with adults in a small classroom...And since I speak English as a second language—which, I don’t have a lot of work experience in business area—I thought it would be important to me to be surrounded by adults in a small classroom environment. So that was the second factor I chose Mission. And I could graduate if I studied full time and very hard; I could graduate in a year. Or in a year and a half. And that’s what just happened.” (Kira, 019)

In discussing the personal factors in her decision to enroll at Mission, Paula noted its Christian affiliation as an important reason in her choice:

I'm very happy with Mission. Especially the fact that it's Christian faith learning. Christian foundation...It was definitely a factor...But I looked at a couple of other colleges before I made my decision. One of the [inaudible 00:10:32] that – in my old church she had – we were talking about school before. She was telling me she was taking a double major right now – at that time. And I was like, “Well where are you going?” She told me the school, and she was telling me how phenomenal it was. How she loved it and she knows that I would love it. And I was like, “Really?” She was like, “Yeah.” So then I came up here and spoke with Leanne. She gave me a tour. I looked up the curriculum and saw the classes and the courses, everything that I would take, and then how long it would take me to graduate. It was all planned out. I was very excited; I couldn't wait to start. And I've been happy and content ever since. I don't regret signing up to go here; I don't regret the course that I'm taking. My major; I don't regret any of it. So I'm very happy at Mission.” (031-033)

As she described her choice, and her happiness with how it aligned with mutually academic and personal priorities, she also emphasizes the role of peers in her awareness of and pursuit of enrollment at Mission. Across both sites, most students similarly indicated that they knew someone who attended, whether it was a family member, friend, or colleague. For example, Grace specifically mentioned a friend who was enrolled in Mission's accounting program as the reason she enrolled. She also explained that her family's limited educational history contributed to her reluctance to conceptualize herself as interested in and prepared for college. She cited her 40th birthday as a key motivator to “do something that I'm happy with” (Grace, 013).

Ingrid also recalled family experiences and contexts that brought her to Mission. In doing so, she conceptualized her challenging path as influencing her learning for the better:

Well, as a learner I've grown to appreciate the struggle. Before, when I was younger, you've got to figure that I dropped out of high school to have my children. Had my life, and then when my youngest son was three I decided to go back and get my associate's degree. So I realized that I wouldn't be able to make anything of myself, support my family, if I didn't get an education. Fast forward 25 years. I got divorced, and then realized that an associate degree just wasn't enough. Especially working in the education field. I mean, really, an associate degree is like having your high school diploma now. I was terrified of school when I first started. (029-030b)

Sharing other students' articulated fears about readiness for and ability to succeed in college, Ingrid characterized her academic motivation as rooted in a desire to provide for herself and her family, as did Tony in Chapter 4. She also described how her divorce forced her to reconceptualize her academic needs and goals for herself as well as for her family (Alfred, 2002b; Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Acknowledging how her path has been accompanied by cumulative challenges, in addition to her own fears, she framed them as deepening her learning process and perspectives. She concluded this discussion by highlighting her first instructor's positive influence, and her desire to let her know how she has contributed to her future educational aspirations as well as her present successes: "But my first instructor – in fact, I'm going to write her a letter – she was instrumental in me being successful in my whole journey. She was – in fact, I am contemplating going for my master's so I can teach" (Ingrid, 031b).

Hannah attributed her Mission University enrollment choice to encouraging conversation with Andrew about the institution's approach to teaching, and how she perceived its alignment with her learning style:

...I chose Mission a lot because Andrew talked about the Socratic teaching and the critical thinking. And where nothing is really right or wrong; it's all based on taking what you know in your life, applying it to the theory, and coming up with your own conclusion. And as long as you conclude that you have a reason for coming up with what you did, writing the papers and things like that should be a piece of cake. And I'm really good at—I hate to use the word B.S.—but I'm really good at B.S.ing my way through papers. And being able to really show my critical thinking really well. So I felt that that type of learning style was going to be the best for me. And it has been. It's been the perfect way for me to learn. Mission is literally geared towards somebody with my brain." (Hannah, 020)

As did other participants, Hannah highlighted her enrollment at Mission as a different, more deliberate choice than her initial experience at a community college. Elsewhere in her interview, she described a combination of family, health, and personal factors that led to both her decision to

start at the regional community college and her subsequent dropping out. Her joking comments about her ability to “B.S.” are also interesting in light of the excitement she expressed about Mission, as well as how she described her interpretation of critical thinking and the Socratic method. Taken alone, her “B.S.” comment may be interpreted as not utilizing or possessing college-level writing or research skills (Barton et al., 2000). It may also contribute to practitioner perspectives about adult students lacking seriousness about or investment in their college education, a theme that is discussed in more depth in Chapter 6. However, when situating such comments back within the broader context of her candid, in-depth interview reflections, in which she delved into her academic background, experiences, priorities, and practices, a more complex picture of her academic priorities and motivations emerges (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Schön, 1983).

A concluding note should be made about Hannah’s open discussion of her ADD diagnosis. She emphasizes that it helped her understand why she found it difficult to read and write longer texts, to adhere to deadlines, and to follow complex instruction without visual guides. Relatedly, she expressed throughout the interview that she prioritizes taking in person classes whenever possible, to keep on task, keep motivated, and activate her learning more effectively (Lea & Street, 2006). Overall, Hannah’s responses join her peer participants’ equally complex interviews in illustrating just how much there is for practitioners to consider when teaching, evaluating, advising, and tutoring adult undergraduates (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

Institutional Contexts, Resources, and Relationships

Gina expressed satisfaction with Mission’s orientation process in informing her about campus resources, policies, and expectations: “Yeah, they talked about everything. Financial aid, school policies, and expectation from students. We got a tour from the school. We took them on so many

things” (Gina, 043-044). On the other hand, similar to Tony’s and Ella’s descriptions of their advising challenges at St. Clare, Ella shared how an advising oversight required her to take an unexpected course in order to graduate:

I wasn’t told that. So here I’m going along thinking, “Oh, I took this here, so that will apply here too.” You know? Well then later on, I was told [inaudible 00:15:44]. There was—I had submitted about two to three terms ago something to her saying, “Here’s my spreadsheet. I have this, this, and this left to go. Does my records match your records? Am I going to graduate with my anticipated date here at the end of October?” She came back and said, “Yes, you’ll be fine.” Well because I don’t have any faith or trust in her, I sent it again. And she forwarded it off to a different lady. She came back and said, “It’s not an elective that you need; you need to take Business Law.” Well, thank you. Thank you for telling me that. (069-070)

She also described her difficulties with one instructor, although she emphasized that it was an exception to her overall positive experience in Mission’s classes: “There’s one class – only one – where the instructor was less than desirable...she said, “I don’t have time to do PowerPoint presentations. I’m far too busy for that. If you want a PowerPoint presentation –” Kind of like, “You can do the project and we’ll have it in class” (Ella, 096-097). She also noted that she wrote candidly on her mid-term course evaluation, but felt uncomfortable with how the instructor used them in class as opposed to keeping student contributions private: “I’m like I thought these evaluations for you and not to – like nobody knew that I wrote that...But she had the evaluations in front of her, and went one by one kind of reading them. I’m like, ‘That’s new.’ And then in the evaluation one of the girls literally wrote a two-page thing about her problems with this teacher. And I don’t know if anything ever came of it. That was a very terrible experience” (Ella, 097-098). Grace also described exceptions to her generally positive class experiences:

I just know that there’s been instructors that I’ve had, like I said, they just lecture. It’s like oh come on; I’m not learning anything. I’ve also had an instructor to where he was always – he wanted to be your friend. But he didn’t really teach us anything. That’s hard too because I’m paying for these classes; I want to learn something. I think the biggest thing is trying to have a different learning style, or a different way of teaching every week. Try to somehow incorporate little pieces of it into every week, I guess. I like a lot

of the discussions; I think that is really what's helped me learn a lot here in class, is a lot of the discussion work. (Grace, 032-033)

Noting her financial and time investment in her college education, she emphasized instructor consistency and interactive discussions as most beneficial to her learning.

In contrast, Paula described consistently positive experience with instructors and their contributions to her learning: "I'm absolutely finding that aligns with the courses study that I'm taking, and my ability to learn as well. Because the teachers are very attentive. They go over the material, they explain it. They make sure you understand it" (030). In discussing how much she has learned at Mission, she also emphasizes the impact of the small, adult-focused courses:

I like the smaller class setting. The adults accelerated learning. Every class I've had thus far, I've loved it. I've learned so much. It's like at 9 o'clock I'm not even ready to go. I want to continue looking at the videos or the lectures, or the questions. Because I really enjoy it. And it's best when you enjoy what you're doing; best when you enjoy your learning. And it's not so much of a struggle for me. It just flows. (Paula, 030-031)

Amidst the scheduling and family challenges that she described elsewhere in her interview, Paula also highlighted the extent to which interactive learning contexts contributed to her learning in and enjoyment of the long nights in class.

Grace also addressed the long nights and difficult schedules associated with adult evening courses, highlighting how they complicated her ability to access campus resources:

Adult learning, it's a little bit hard at that point because you – I mean once you get to class you have three hours' class; then after that, you're done. Everyone is gone. So you do everything by your own. Or either – at least we have the Writing Center and the Math Center. If I have time I can come there and work with them. That's helpful. Yes. But other than that, it's a little bit difficult because working and studying at the same time is not really easy." (036-037)

She also commented elsewhere on her desire for more career advising services, noting that she believes degree management should be more oriented toward future job pursuit.

Kira highlighted the importance of accessing Mission's Writing Center to support her writing process: "...so after sending it to the Writing Center for reviewing, I get it back. And that's when I feel it's done. If I don't have time—if I happen to not have time to send it for proofreading or any other feedback—I just read it three times. Not in the same day. I do not allow me to read it four times, because it will keep changing, changing, changing. So I read it again, and I don't read following—I read separate sections, separate paragraphs—so I know what's—if that part is okay. And that's it. I send it in and turn it in and that's it" (Kira, 094-095).

Penelope also discussed the Writing Center as an influence on her writing in and out of school, in conjunction with Mission's course selection advising and writing classes:

Because I knew that I struggle a lot in English. And Mission really emphasizes on taking those two classes first. I told them if I had a choice I would have took those last...I think that's one of my weakness, is writing. I told them—because even in high school, I took English in the summer courses.... However, because they really said that this is important, and you need to get these classes done first before you can go ahead and start taking other courses. So I was like, "Okay. I really need to focus." That's why I was like what can I do to help myself? That's what they told me. Writing. Going in, talking. Even keeping the communication with the teacher as well. So I did. Yes...It actually really helped me, because I see that my writing has improved. Even outside of school here too; even at work I realized, okay, I remember I'm not supposed to do this. I really noticed; I'm taking a step back. Usually I'm the person who's really, "Hurry up. Got to get it done; in and out." But I realized I need to take a step back, look at my tone of how I'm emailing out, what I'm writing out. (Penelope, 064-071)

She reflected on the roles played by the Writing Center and her instructors in helping her improve her writing. She also illustrated her own active role in pursuing these resources and making connections within and across her academic and professional writing contexts, purposes, and conventions (Bartlett, 2007; Lea & Street, 2006). In conjunction with her discussion of the Writing Center, Penelope also expressed welcome surprise that Mission provided laptops in one

of her classes, to help students begin working on a 12-page paper during class, in the context of further discussion of how she perceived Mission to invest in and support its students.

Kira noted the importance of having instructors that are sensitive to different student learning styles and students who speak English as an additional language:

It was the most difficult course for me, because the way the teacher taught this class. He was already expecting everybody knew everything. And I didn't know everything. So I couldn't engage. I felt, every class, I would go back home crying, because I couldn't get the information...I didn't feel comfortable and I couldn't engage. So the way I had to learn that, the lessons for that class, were mostly studying by myself. At home, reading the chapters over and over. Trying – it was a lot of self-learning. Because I couldn't engage in his way of teaching....And many technical vocabulary words that I just didn't have then in my English vocabulary. But I did good....And because of that, I didn't participate a lot. And he would keep points of participation. But it wasn't because I didn't want to participate; it's just because I didn't find a way – or how to. That was weird.” (Kira, 072-077).

Kira described an instructional approach in which students' different linguistic backgrounds and contributions were neither incorporated nor valued. The ways in which students described notions of difference as being framed in their classes and own perspectives are discussed more in Chapter 6. At the same time, Kira emphasized that this was an “isolated” teaching experience, affirming her desire to “get into the classroom, the first class, with an open mind. Whatever's coming, I try not to pre-judge or imagine how it's going to be. I just try to—no judging any instructors. Just get in there, get to know how it's going to be, and take it” (Kira, 079). As with St. Clare's students, she reflected a desire to prevent negative experiences from influencing a more judgmental attitude on her part. She also talked enthusiastically about her enrollment advisor: “she was so patient. She answered me all of the questions I needed. And I think that was so important. Because I thought, okay. There I can trust. So the person needs to be flexible and patient” (Kira, 133).

Ingrid emphasized the important role that faculty involvement and feedback played in her learning, especially when it comes to areas she finds challenging:

I don't mind constructive criticism. I think it's very helpful to me. If I don't know what I'm doing wrong, I cannot do better. For example, I took a business communication – organizational communication class. I think I'm pretty good at communication. Hardest class – I mean, really difficult because she must have had her PhD in English. And she was real big on punctuation. And that's one of my weaker areas. And I really got frustrated, and I said, "Keep giving it to me. The feedback." And I asked her, finally, it got to the point. It's like, what can I do? Because I'm at a loss what else I can do. Because I was using – Word has your grammar. You spell check. I'm bad at proofing my own stuff. So she suggested a couple books for me to get. And I don't mind – I enjoy that. Please. Give me constructive criticism. Because I save that. I save it and I go back and I reference it over and over again." (Ingrid, 152-153)

In this vignette, as elsewhere in her interviews, Ingrid demonstrated consistent awareness of what she perceives as her weak areas, and how that drove her to spend more systematic time on her assignments. This reflection also demonstrated not only the value she finds in detailed faculty feedback, but also her commitment to collecting and reflexively learning from it throughout her courses (Schön, 1983).

Students' Self-Conceptualization of Intersecting Identities, Perspectives, Values, and Experiences

Gina situated her adult learning experience in the context of her prior experience at a traditional college. She also expressed her initial nervousness about what it would mean for her: "...very nervous about when we're – adult learning, actually, it's better...because students are more responsible than compared to traditional college. People know what they're coming to do here, first of all. And so it's about being serious in class, and with the assignments. You might have, maybe – may be very busy, but you just have to take the time enough to study" (Gina, 052-053). She characterized herself as resonating with the seriousness required of and reflected by Mission's students.

Grace highlighted how her enjoyment of college as an adult surprised her:

I actually enjoy coming to school more than going to work. So I said if I could be a full time student – if I could afford that – I would definitely do that. Which is funny, because I’ve never been – I work in education, but I’ve just never been, “I’ve got to go to school; I have to get this.” That’s just not really my goals in life. It never was. And now I just knew I had to do something different. So that’s why I decided to go back to school. I’m loving it; I really am. I love the people I’ve been meeting. Even just the human services course work. I’m learning so much. (016)

She also emphasized how it has opened her up to new experiences and perspectives, and how she has learned to value them as well as her own achievements:

And I always try to tell people that I’ve actually lived in the [inaudible 00:04:14] area. So I drive here. And it’s an hour to get here, but I feel like I’ve been sheltered so much that when I go here for human services, I am learning so much that’s out there that I have no idea. It’s almost like you see it on the news, but it really doesn’t happen type thing. So it’s really opened my eyes up to a lot of things. And I really do see that continuing education, it really is important for people. Even if you don’t know your niche in life, I think you’re going to – it still just helps you in every area of your life. So it’s been great. I feel smarter. (Grace, 016-017)

Her reflection suggests that college has exposed her to issues and ideas that she didn’t know existed, and thus never sought out on her own before (Bartlett, 2007). She also linked her long commute to living in a more rural area, distant from the city, that “sheltered” her.

Kira also described how her cultural background influenced her as a learner, but, in contrast with Grace, she emphasized how it equipped her to navigate and learn in college:

So I am from a high contact culture. So I like teachers that connect with students, and they make sure to let them know they are unique. They call you by your name, they know who you are. They identify your difficulties, and they help you. So I like to be unique in a classroom. That’s important to me. I am a visual learner, so I need visuals so I can learn. The instructors that only talk does not help me learn too much. So I need resources like – I need lecturing, I need visuals. I need articles to read and I need papers to write. So that helps me; learning through different ways. (038)

Further, she described how her cultural learning contexts and values have informed both her learning processes and commitments at Mission:

I dedicate a lot. I take longer to study in English. And that makes me spend more time than a regular student would. A regular English speaking student. But I dedicate a lot; I read a lot; I try to follow all the rules. I'm a little bit methodic. And that helps me learn. It makes me feel comfortable following all the steps so I don't feel lost. Sometimes I lack some time management, but I take accountability for my actions. I know that victories are mine, and so are my mistakes. And I tend to use resources – tutoring resources – regarding to writing. But not – sometimes if you are taking math classes you have difficulties with math... I usually help. It's not related to the subject. Because I'm able to learn through the textbooks and I am very inquisitive. I go, and research, and find my ways to get that knowledge, and the information. That I need help with proofreading and grammar. English is tough. You can't believe this stuff later. (Kira, 038-039)

Highlighting her challenges with English and the extra time she devotes to her methodical learning and writing processes, she also affirmed her sense of ownership of and fulfillment in both her culturally contextualized learning as well as her victories and mistakes (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Hagood, 2002; Schön, 1983). Penelope shared her perceptions about adult learning and its affordances in the context of a conversation she had with a younger student:

I think because right now, coming in as an adult learner, it's different too. I realize that it's a different perspective from someone coming out of high school, and someone from adult learning. I realize that the adult learners are more focused. Yes. They know that they're here for a reason. I think with one of the individuals like the high school person who I spoke to, she was like, "Well, my parents made me."...But her mentality is much different now. (150)

She also discussed how returning to college as an adult has fit into her professional goals. In recounting this conversation with her younger colleague, she emphasized that hearing others' professional and academic experiences is important to understanding how college may fit someone's lives: "...I was telling her the reason why I'm going back to school is because I want to get the promotion. I want it. And she's like, Okay.' Because she wants to go in HR. I'm like, 'Well, if you want to go HR, if you want to get into it, you might need a good education.' I don't

think she has that personal experience, or have heard about other people's experiences. Yes" (Penelope, 150-151).

Paula addressed her professional life as well, but focused more on how her work as a legal secretary is detached from her passion for helping people. She described the motivation for her decision to study psychology in college:

I do outreach at my church, and I'm on the prayer team. But it's just to help people become whole. I don't know how more to say it. To help them become whole and resolve their issues. To help other people to help themselves. Whatever path that takes me down. I'd like to do missionary work as well. Someday that's my aim and goal. I've been fascinated with psychology for a while. How the mind works, and chemistry, the makeup of the body and everything. This is fascinating to me...(027-028)

In her reflection, Paula expressed how other dimensions of her life, such as her church community, inform and lend context for her academic goals (Alfred, 2002b; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). She also discussed how she already has applied what she has learned in her psychology course to how she listens to and interacts with people, especially in fraught situations (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998).

And it helps me, when somebody's coming at me the wrong way, to not get angry; to watch how I perceive it. It's all in our perception of the way someone's talking to us, or the tone of their voice. Just to maintain my composure in any given situation. But I do know, I'm able to work with a diverse group of people. I don't let – somebody yelling at me – I don't let it affect me. Especially as I'm getting older. You definitely need psychology more ...I just want to get to an area that I'm passionate about. So that I can be the best that I can be in that field, and helping people, and working with people; communicating with people and engaging people. Just trying to make this place a better place to live, and the world a better place. As a whole. That's what got me interested in psychology. In a nutshell." (Paula, 028-029)

She linked her desire to improve the way she approaches diverse and challenging interpersonal situations to her broader passion for counseling, as well as the way in which it can enable her to make a difference in the world (Brookfield & Holst, 2011).

Ingrid also situated her approach to learning in the larger service of understanding how to think and act more openly and ethically in the world. She stressed openness about other cultures, contexts, and paradigms as critical, along with emphasizing a reflective stance toward her own positionalities. In doing so, she also shared examples of what she sees as more fixed and limited perspectives:

But as a learner you have to be open to new ideas. To experiences. Not being set so if I were a male and I was a chauvinist, or if I was a person that didn't drink, or a religious person but then I'm faced with Muslim culture. It's putting everything aside and opening your mind to those new experiences and new thoughts. And even though we don't agree with some of the items that we're learning about, but try and understand them, and to grow; and I guess put yourself in that place. A lot of my ethics classes touched on some ethical things – I'm a big one for acting ethical at work. (Ingrid, 045-046)

She went on to reflect further on notions of choice and context, putting her own subjectivities into play: “but then they brought up a lot of the situations like at Enron and Arthur Anderson, and some of the people that were charged however the viewpoint. You read some of these people's – why they chose to do that. And then I kind of put myself in their place and say, “Well, maybe I can't judge that because maybe if I was in that spot at that particular time, wouldn't it have been possible?”” (Ingrid, 046) She challenged even her own criteria for open, ethical, critical thinking, noting how her learning has evolved over time (Alfred, 2002; Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Finally, she expressed how her progression as a learner has driven her to reject her prior sense of ethical and subjective dichotomies, toward a more nuanced perspective on the multiplicity and potential of thinking critically in and about the world (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007):

So many different viewpoints I've become a lot more flexible, I guess – accepting. That's the word I want. A lot more accepting of different opinions. Even though I've always been easy going and non-judgmental, sometimes you're faced with certain things you grow up with. And it's just, there's right and there's wrong. There is no, you know, black and white; there's no grey area. But I've learned that, yeah, there is. It's mostly grey area. And not a lot of black and white. Even though in one's mind you think there is. And I think that critical thinking is that grey area. It's that sliding area that you just need to open up your mind. And reach for the stars. (Ingrid, 045-047)

CHAPTER 6: CROSS-SITE DISCUSSION OF THEMES—STUDENT USE OF TIME AND THE ROLE OF OF REFLECTION IN STUDENT LEARNING NARRATIVES

This chapter will address two key themes emerging across both sites: (1) students' use of time, and how it is perceived by faculty as a marker for seriousness about college, and (2) the role of reflection in student learning narratives.

Theme 1: Student Use of Time

Students' emphasis on time management was threaded throughout their interviews, beyond specific interview questions or associated topics. While identifying significant, often extreme challenges in negotiating academic, personal, and professional lives, they also consistently emphasized their commitment to their college education. While student narratives reflect rich variations and complexity, every student expressed that, for them, the sacrifices are worth it. Their narrative reflections on their use of time emerge as perhaps the dominant theme in this study.

Practitioners' supplementary interview narratives also surfaced discussions about student use of time and priorities. However, in contrast to students' framing of their academic time management as a deliberate, ongoing practice permeating all dimensions of their lives, practitioners often expressed doubt, dissatisfaction, or lowered expectations regarding students' time spent on coursework. In particular, they framed their discussions about student use of time as negatively associated with perceived student seriousness about their college educations. This aligns with studies suggesting misalignment between student and practitioner expectations and values (Cahill et al., 2010; Cox, 2010; Groves & Groves, 1980; Jacobs & Hundley, 2010; Kasworm, 2004, 2010; Mullins & Park, 2008; Taylor et al., 2000).

Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate student findings that counter practitioner assumptions about the costs and contexts of students' academic time management. Students consistently linked their discussions about their use of time to deeper reflection on the sacrifices that their college educations require. They also consistently emphasized how they have willingly taken up these challenges, and how much their college educations mean to them. This chapter will further demonstrate the ways in which student use of time demonstrates their commitments to prioritizing college amidst complex personal and professional obstacles. Contextualizing student perspectives alongside examples of practitioners' often divergent views suggests directions for a more complex understanding of how students' practices and choices are situated within, engaged, and perceived in their adult learning-specific institutions.

Student Perspectives

Student narratives expressed overarching emphasis on the fulfillment and enjoyment they found in their college learning experiences, despite their overburdened schedules. For example, Grace explained her adjustment to college, noting how her enjoyment of its demands surprised her:

Knowing that it's taking a night of my week already that's busy, and now you add – they say usually 12 hours outside of class time to work on your homework. It all depends on the class; it all depends on your instructor. Who you have. I haven't really been spending 12 hours in each class. But I enjoy it. It's really not what I thought it was going to be...we're – I mean, we're really here from six to nine. Very rarely are we out earlier than 9 o'clock. And when I drive home an hour, that's nice because I actually soak everything in that I just was talking about with fellow students and [instructor]. (Grace, 021-023)

In addition to reflecting on the meaningfulness of her class time and interactions, Grace also reflected a common sentiment that her learning stayed activated after class ended, and that late night drives home were used to reflect on rather than conclude her learning.

There is also significant overlap between how students describe the role of family members and work in their lives and how students discuss how they manage their time.

I have work, and I have kids. Nobody has time. You make time. I can say I work full time. I have a baby. I have a husband. I have a house I need to clean up. You know what, I do have time. I do. I have – my son goes to bed at 7 o'clock at night. I can eat dinner when he's awake, and 7 o'clock, from when I go to bed, that's some time. I just don't get to watch TV. And if your end goal is worth it to you, you make the time for it. And it works. And after a while – it's hard at first, but it just becomes part of your routine, and you don't even notice it. Now it's just part of my life. 'Oh, I have homework this weekend. Not a big deal.' ... Yeah, it's definitely, I have to say no to a lot of social things. And I'm okay with that. I say no. To me, it doesn't feel like a big difference, just because I kind of evolved with it. So it doesn't feel like that much of a change, I guess? I guess I have to change. (Elyse, 277-281)

In this example, Elyse illustrated how many facets of her family and social life have been affected by her prioritization of college and how much time it requires in her week. Like most students, she indicated that much of her work has to take place late at night, after children go to sleep or after work or class gets out. She expressed, however, a willingness to adapt and embrace these changes as part of a long-term commitment to her education.

Nina also discussed the extent to which she has had to sacrifice family time to prioritize college while also managing a time-intensive job:

I think that it's been good; it's been busy. There's definitely sacrifice. It's allowed me, though, to be – I've got a lot of support from my family. I think one of the main things when we first started, the advisor that I had at that time was really clear about, "Hey, when you start it's important to have those conversations. Have those conversations with the people that you're close with. Lay out those expectations." So I think it's been – it could have been worse. I mean there's times that, yes, there's a lot between work and home and school. But it's been, I'd say, a good experience. It's one that, obviously, helps you manage your time even better than you thought you were. I think one of the things is really about staying focused. When I'm working I'm not thinking about school; when I'm at school or I'm working on homework I'm just thinking about that. (Nina, 028-029)

As did Grace and Elyse, Nina emphasized her willingness to make these sacrifices—that her college education is worth it. Penelope echoed this perspective, noting the shifts in both family and work time, as well as in her learning style and choices:

Here, now that I know more that education's very important, my learning style's been more focused on education. Even during lunch time, I'm taking advantage of that time....because I'm taking only one course I'm able to – I do a lot of time management at night. I also have two kids too. So at night, whenever I put them to sleep, I [inaudible 00:07:13] allocate that time to study, yes. On the weekend, my husband knows that our priorities are shifting. He knows he's taking the kids; I'm going to be studying, yes. (Penelope, 050-055)

The time commitments that students embraced, despite the significant efforts they entail, significantly affected their families as well as themselves. Penelope's example also highlighted how carefully student time is managed, even working through lunch at work and not affording herself breaks. In the context of practitioner doubts about whether students are spending sufficient time on their course work, these student examples suggest that the disconnect may be rooted in a quantitative framing of student time, in which discrete amounts of time, like an hour at a time during lunch, are decontextualized from the costs, intentionality, and dedication that a deceptively limited hour may convey.

Also of relevance is Penelope's discussion of sacrifices beyond giving up evening and weekend time with her children and husband, most prominently her husband's changing his work hours. She explained that she initially considered online courses due to the pressures that in person courses put on her family. However, she also made clear that in person classes were important enough to her learning that she and her family prioritized around them.

...we have kids. I was – and so especially, I know, for personal reasons, my husband works the third shift; the second and third shift. We have to find babysitters in the morning and at night... That's one of the things that we gave up. We're just like, "Okay. If you're going back to school, we need to look at daycare too as well." I think that was one of the challenges too. We actually worked it out. I really liked the in class. I focused

more, and I can tell my grades are much an improvement; better than taking an online course. (Penelope, 084-087)

The extent to which Penelope and her husband adjusted their work schedules speaks to a deep commitment to Penelope's college education. The decision for her husband to change his work shifts has implications for their ability to spend time together as well as for how they manage parenting. The often significant costs of child care were added to Penelope's financial investment in her education, beyond the impacts on her role as a parent, spouse, and professional. While it is reasonable for practitioners to be unaware of students' individual financial and parenting situations, attention to the intersecting factors in student experience would also yield greater understanding of what kind of costs are embedded in the very choice to attend college as an adult (Donaldson & Graham, 2006).

Tony and Paula described, as did Penelope, Nina, and others, how the demands of their professional and family lives impact when they can allot time for school work, not just how much—including limiting their sleep. Paula indicated starting homework at 11 pm, after her family goes to bed, often staying up all night. Tony explains, "I just try to make it all work. I don't go to sleep sometimes until two. Stay up till two, leave here at five, six" (Tony, 287). Despite this draining schedule, Tony connected the issue of time management and his preference for interactive teaching styles that require students to be actively engaged: "Yeah. It's great, it keeps me up. I'm here [at work] at 6 o'clock, sometimes 7 o'clock sometimes. I go to sleep at two. So I like interaction in the class. If we can do that, I think that would help you out. I know some people don't like to move. Make them move anyway; they can move. Change is good" (Tony, 582-585). This level of commitment to making time for school work is hard to overlook, as is the physical difficulty it imposes on already overtaxed schedules. These extraordinary time commitments, in which students even deprive themselves of sufficient sleep in order to spend

time on school work, also have implications for students' health. With such costs and consequences in play, consideration of the impacts on student engagement in class might seem secondary, though important; the latter is visible to instructors, without the context of the former. However, what is clear throughout all student accounts is that these sacrifices only amplify their investment not only in devoting time to their coursework, but also to participating in course formats and activities that stimulate their active engagement and challenge their learning.

Paula also described impact of personal commitments like having to move out of her apartment, as well as parenting, on her ability to maintain her goal of 7-8 hours of homework each week:

But primarily during the week I try and make sure I get in my studying, my reading day by day. To make sure I understand the material. And definitely on the weekends. I still try and do stuff in between that. Because my kids like to go to the movies and they like to do stuff...so on the weekend, we go to church for sure on Sundays. And on Saturdays, depending on what my homework looks like and what their homework looks like, we may or may not do something...if I have a chapter of a book to read, I'll try to read it on my lunch at work. Or just the material that we might have for class, I try to read it on my lunch. I will sit in my car and read it at the desk, in the back, and start jotting down whatever I need to jot down. Depending on the assignment. But I basically try to get in reading time on a daily basis. It might not be long; it may be 15 to 20 minutes. It may be an hour. But it varies from day to day depending on what's going on...I think that's why it all came to a crashing halt with everything that was going on...the move and everything like that...Because normally I'm able to cope, but this time I was like, "I can't." I'm really, really not holding it together. So I was like I need to take this term off for sure. And I know I'll be refreshed going into the next course. It was becoming overwhelming. (Paula, 066-073)

Like Penelope, Paula described using lunch time to maximize as much homework as possible. Squeezing in 15 minutes at a time may not sound like much to practitioners whose academic backgrounds may have involved and afforded more time dedicated to coursework. However, these student accounts illustrate how hard won this time is. The high degree of attention and energy that students like Paula dedicated to prioritizing time for coursework is striking. It is also

suggestive of a complex negotiation of the college costs, trade-offs, and benefits that contribute to a decision like Paula's to drop a course, thereby extending her time to degree completion.

As Paula illustrated, dropping her course was a function of purposeful and reluctant choice. While student drop-out frequency is characterized in the literature and among both student and practitioner accounts as common, it raises questions about what student course drops represent to practitioners, what messages are signaled to students who drop out, and whether they are regarded as an act of agency or as consequence of students' complex lives, especially in light of this study's emergence of practitioner doubts about students' use of time and commitments to their education (Donaldson & Graham, 2006; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007).

The issue of time also affected students' ability to enroll, not just to participate in class. Faith described her enrollment at St. Clare as contingent upon finding time that aligned with family commitments: "...it's nice. Especially because my sister also goes to St. Clare. She goes on Thursdays, so I watch my niece every Thursday. Knowing that I'm not going to have to go to school on Thursdays is a good thing; just so I'm available to watch my niece so she can get to school too, and finish her bachelor degree as well, actually" (Faith, 017-018). Faith's example is also striking in its emphasis on college pursuit as a collective endeavor, reflective of a shared family responsibility for and support of college (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Graham et al., 2000). Her ability to pursue a college education is tied to enabling and supporting her sister's, and her time commitments involve participating in child care along with managing work and school.

Students also discussed prioritizing changes in their time management that didn't align with their learning styles and preference. However, they still emphasized that the transition and associated challenges are worth it to them. Describing herself as someone who works best closer to deadlines, as did Paula, Yara talked about it as a more deliberative choice that builds on her

learning style. She also describes how she evolved from her initial college experience at a local for-profit institution to now pushing herself and being more excited about learning at St. Clare:

When I first started I thought, ‘Oh, I can breeze through my reading one night, do the notes the next night, and I’m good.’ And now I’m learning, when I get home from class, I need to wind down anyways. I can’t just come home and go to sleep. So I take an hour when I get home and I wind down by actually going through my notes. And tweaking things while they’re still fresh. The other night – last week I came home and I wrote an entire paper. I was so jazzed up about the class that I just – and it was the rough draft of it, but I banged out an entire rough draft in an hour and a half...So I’m definitely – whereas I’m still on the crunch mode of things, I’m not waiting until it’s Sunday night and I’m up til midnight finishing my homework...Rather, I’m doing a portion of the homework now, a portion here. So I’m kind of learning a little bit more time management with the way I approach things. (Yara, 055-059)

While the bulk of her work is timed closer to assignment deadlines than some other students at St. Clare reported, she described an equally labor-intensive approach to her work. Revisiting her notes at night, after class, means that she continues working after she drives home from classes that end anywhere from 9-10 pm, excluding any time spent after class talking to the instructor or classmates. As did other students, she also elaborated on the importance of precisely allotting time and managing her work, family, and academic responsibilities, including how her evolving perspectives on academic time management are both reflective of and built into her schedule:

“I’m already looking through – I might be that crunch student, but I plan my crunch. I’m very OCD with that sort of thing because I have to maneuver everything around a full time job, four children, sports, their jobs. So it’s not, “Oh, well, we’ll see what’s coming up for next week.” That first night of class, I know what the roster is looking like and I’m asking for details on assignments that don’t quite – they’re not detailed enough on the syllabus and I wanna know what they’re looking for so I can – my reading assignments, I just continue ahead if it’s asking. So yeah, the night the class ends, I’m already reviewing my syllabus for my next class. Kind of seeing what approach I’m gonna wanna take with it.” (Yara, 134-136)

Finally, with regard to how she prioritizes her time in relation to utilizing institutional resources like the library or tutoring, she indicates that she feels “detached” from the main campus, where

the bulk of such resources are located, due to the younger student population and their different places in their educational journey. She notes that as classes get harder, she anticipates seeking out these resources more, but identifies distance and time as posing the major obstacles: “Just very out of the way for me. If it was closer and more convenient, I’d probably pop in and do studying and stuff there often. But it’s completely – and either way I go, at that time of day, I’m hitting traffic. So is seeing this campus and getting a book from there that important to me with everything else I have going on? Not really” (Yara, 168-169).

Gina discussed adult learning as requiring a significant investment of time and energy. In her discussion, she emphasized happiness with Mission and framed a proportional relationship between the amount of time students can spend on coursework and the degree of learning they can access.

...if you know what you want and what you want to get, and put yourself into it, you’ll get through. So Mission, for me it’s a very good school. It’s very, very good school. It’s just about your time; how you set your time; how you schedule your time. If you have enough time to work on the assignments – because everyone who comes here is busy. Parents and...work when you get home. If you don’t have a class that day, at least sit – for a week, at least 15 hours. Just for your studies. At least. 12 to 15 hours of coursework. You will do better. (213)

However, when addressing what it’s like to manage a schedule amidst work and school, Gina acknowledged the unexpected challenges to even tightly managed schedules:

It’s crazy. I would do that, but I can expect something to come up. Like, you know, maybe I plan to study at that time, and then something comes up. But I always set my schedule, and I always try my best to finish my assignments on time. And...have time to do other stuff. I just don’t have to do school work, school work; I also have to enjoy myself. You know? Relaxing and sleeping. Yeah. But I already had a tough term this time, because I had a problem with my laptop. And since everything is due online, oh my god, it’s really bad...I remember – yeah. I remember once I submitted an assignment so late. But my teacher, she knew that I wouldn’t do that, because she knew I was a student who would always submit my assignments on time. Yeah. It’s hard sometimes. (Gina. 214-217)

In this example, Gina notes the importance of her instructor's acceptance of her late assignment and their willingness to contextualize individual student events or issues in the larger context of their class contributions and engagement. She also describes a complication of the ubiquitous use of computers in college and the expectation of submitting assignments electronically—having uninterrupted access to a computer. The time and cost involved in fixing or replacing a computer represents significant obstacles. The campus computer lab offers a solution in such circumstances. However, Gina identifies a further complication regarding accessing that resource, in the context of a discussion about how her job and transportation issues affect the time she can devote to school.

Having discussed elsewhere the difficulty she had finding a job after transitioning from Kenya to Illinois to the site of this study, she discussed the transition between working in the campus computer lab every day for the first few weeks to having to “cope with my first time doing job and study at the same time. It was, the first two weeks it was very hard for me” (260-261). While she identified elsewhere in her interview that she wasn't a parent like most of her classmates, demonstrating a sensitivity to the multiple identities and responsibilities in play for adult undergraduates, she shared an intense schedule of her own, made more challenging by public transportation:

I was working – the first week we were working every day. I mean every day and night. I had off the other week after...It was very tough for me. I was not sleeping very well. But then I came to adjusted this by, I think, the fourth week. Yeah. Fourth, fifth week then. I tried adjusting everything. Now I knew the system...because if I finish my work it will be around four, five. ... I explained to the manager. He's like, “Okay, fine.” Then I'm working from eight to four. That is two hours to get ready....Yeah. And then I was using the bus. And I still – well, okay, I got a car. But just recently. But it was really hard using the bus. Getting the bus...to here, it might take even one hour and a half. So if you can imagine from work, you finish and then...Instead of going back home I come straight here. It was so tough. Yeah. (Gina, 260-267)

While adult-focused practitioners demonstrated awareness of the local employment and more broadly socioeconomic factors that factor into students' college choice and the resultant influences on their experience, persistence and completion, it is unclear how complicated they regard these factors. For instance, the region in which this study was conducted has limited bus transit and no subways; cars are the default transportation. However, this may contribute to a similarly default practitioner assumption that because everyone has a car, so to speak, every one of their students has a car. Thus car ownership is not framed as a privilege that may exclude members of their campus community, and the costs and sometimes extraordinary time commitments that taking bus transit represent are often absent from practitioners' conceptualization of what it ultimately takes for students to access campus and its resources (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002). If personal context may be relevant here, my travel to both study campuses sometimes required buses as well. Driving time was often extended by an hour or more, depending on weather and traffic; the difficulties in getting to class on time right after work and/or in snow would be well known to practitioners. The bus took longer and was unreliable in schedule. While the bus stops one two streets away from campus, its location in an executive office park means no sidewalks. In my experience, the logistical challenges and time commitments of the bus were also well enough known to students that I received multiple offers of a drive home they found out I had not driven to campus. It should be noted that Hal, a St. Clare advisor, also offered.

These student descriptions of the significant time they devoted to their schoolwork, and the often extraordinary sacrifices they willingly made, suggest profound commitments to taking active roles in their learning, meeting course and, more broadly, college expectations, and contributing to interactive, shared learning experiences in class. The consistency, complexity, and depth of student accounts across both sites are made more striking in relation to often

contradictory practitioner perspectives, which are discussed in the next section. This contrast raises questions for practitioners and researchers alike about what is expected, and what is accepted as evidence, in terms of student use of time, and how it signifies as a marker of adult student seriousness about college.

Practitioner Perspectives

Review of the varied practitioner supplementary interview data suggests evidence of a dichotomy drawn across students' perceived out-of-school lives, their perceived ability or desire to devote sufficient time to coursework, and how their perceived uses of time serve as a marker for student seriousness about college. One of the notable exceptions comes from Renata, an advisor, who emphasized the intersectional nature of students' in and out of school lives. The following vignette offers a striking example of how she conceptualized her practice, which she narratively framed as "walking the journey" with her students:

So I am an academic advisor. We do way more than that, though. So much happens in the sessions with our students. So much more than talking about academics...if I say that I walk the journey with my students, I was a part time working wife and mother of a toddler who wants to return after a couple of years. And then I was a single father. Full custody. With back injuries, working [inaudible 00:54] hours a day. Laying down most of the day, and yet still being a straight A student...And another student just dropped by. Was a minister who just got laid off. And wanting to move forward and said that he felt led to come back, and they just happened to send him to me. And he said he felt God led him there. And shared a whole bunch of experiences about his struggles. And then at that, there was a student that was struggling with Mission, and had some complaints and some frustrations, and some barriers in the learning style. But didn't realize it. So that was one day. (Renata, 003-004)

Renata's example conveys a powerful, nuanced understanding of students' lives and learning selves. She also affirmed the deep interconnectedness of their multiple roles, challenges, identities, and practices, in and out of school. Further, she framed student challenges, such as layoffs and injuries, as corresponding or coexisting with their academic agency, efforts, and

successes, as opposed to casting doubt or suggesting a lower bar for their expected achievements (Harper & Quaye, 2009).

In contrast, a more common tendency observed across practitioner response was to evaluate as oppose to describe or value students' lives, learning practices, and especially their use of time. evaluative perspectives on students' learning and use of time. For example, Floyd situated a view of students' lives and time management within the context of his own life:

But I don't have a lot of – let me tell you. About 90% of the female students always have “a lot going on in their life”, and they will always tell me. “I have so much going on. You have no idea how busy I am.”...And I tell them, I said, “You know what? I spent 21 years in the Air Force and I've had 18 hour days where I've carried dead bodies and – don't tell me about tough week.”...Everybody's busy. (23200-24584)

Immediately striking is Floyd's use of an explicitly personal, out-of-school experience as criteria against which he compares students. The ways in which he narratively positions himself in terms of enduring and overcoming extremity contrasts with Renata's narrative positioning of herself in conversation and “walking with” students. Instead, he articulated a mutual evaluation and dismissal of student contexts. In discounting students' own criteria for overextended time commitments, he also discounted the possibility of student agency in these articulated contexts (Hagood, 2002; Janks, 2010; Street, 2001).

It is also interesting that Floyd's statement discursively maintained its distance from and authority over students by omitting a shared academic context. Instead, he emphasized a military service context that signifies a highly specific system of power, values, and, by extension, student indebtedness to his service. Finally, his statement narratively configured “female” students as outside the domains of both his experience and evaluative criteria, reifying gendered deficit constructions of women's participation in male-centric socio-political systems of power (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007).

Along with this finding, it emerged that Floyd's interview, along with other practitioners', demonstrated significant evidence of internal contradictions and shifting reflective stances toward students. Some of those details will be addressed in the second part of this chapter. Focus here will remain on specific examples of practitioners' perspectives on students' use of time and seriousness about college. Edward, another instructor, expressed similar statements as Floyd regarding of students' use of time, or lack thereof, wondering, "Why aren't you guys using the Writing Center? Why aren't you reading each other's papers? Why aren't you doing that?' ...Well, I know what it is. It's laziness. They're all lazy" (70424-72127). As with Floyd's response, Edward's query presumes knowledge about student lives that is not represented within the framing of his statements. As a consequence, his statement revolves around an instructor-provided, but unsubstantiated, construction of students as not caring about or investing time in their learning. In both describing and evaluating students as lazy, he leaves no narrative space for alternative criteria or even the possibility of student agency or time commitment either amidst or despite the complexity of adult lives.

A different vantage point on student seriousness comes from Violet, a faculty coordinator. In describing the student population, she mentioned doubts about students' willingness to put in the time to succeed in college, emphasizing a broader skepticism about student fit or belonging:

And now we're starting to make our way back to be more, to strengthen our policies a little bit more...we saw really big influx of underprepared students....I'm sure it has a lot to do with the economics of the city. And then it was right around the financial recession and all that stuff. But just a huge burst of students. To the point where we had to develop a whole first year track for freshmen, basically. People coming into college with less than 24 credits, or had never been to college before. Very underprepared. But they came on so quickly that we didn't really have the chance to assess whether we wanted to serve them or should serve them. (671-684)

Violet's example illustrates the double bind that adult college students find themselves in—exhorted by public and political discourses to achieve a college education for the good of the workforce and informed civic participation, but constructed as outsiders in relation to traditional, normalized postsecondary contexts and identities. However, Violet suggests the need for gatekeeping at adult learning-focused institutions like Mission, as well, in which students' academic literacies and practices are considered entry criteria rather than part of the college learning process (Casanave & Li, 2008; Donaldson & Rentfro, 2006). While not all student participants identified if or how much college experience they had before enrolling in their sites, their interview narratives consistently demonstrated significant commitment to and time spent on not just accumulating academic literacies and learning, but on pushing themselves to learn, contribute, and grow as much as possible.

Valerie, an administrator and faculty member, also framed her perspectives on student priorities in terms of her own academic trajectory:

The big surprise for me when I started here was that getting their education wasn't their top priority. I grew up in a very privileged position in which it was—from the time I was a little girl—it was expected that I would go to college. And education was a top priority... Very few of the students here grew up in that kind of culture. With that kind of money to be able to do that. With those kinds of expectations. And so I really had to—and then of course I came here after having earned a PhD. How much focus has to be on to do that, to get that. And so it surprised me that very few of the students in the...community, education is number one. Family is clearly number one. Education is maybe third. Because work is probably – keeping their job and supporting their families is number two...And then college is number three. So I would say I had to lower my expectations in terms of the kind of time commitment the students would put in. In terms of the performance standards that they would be able to meet. (640-655)

Valerie's narrative is a complicated one. Her interview discussion of students demonstrated understanding of their values and contexts, and was framed by largely affirmative perspectives. Her vignette is, instead, noteworthy for its exception within her generally positive narrative. In particular, her acknowledgement of academic privilege suggests a consciousness of the

sociocultural contexts and capital invested in normalized, traditional higher education, compounded by advanced degree attainment. However, it functions in her narrative as a reification of that privilege, in which students are constructed in relation to their distance from and disengagement from similar pursuits and accomplishments.

More broadly, her reflection demonstrates that even practitioners who take up affirmative, supportive stances toward students are influenced by normative deficitizing messages suggesting a limiting dichotomy between students' lives and academic priorities. Further, it demonstrates a conceptualization of learning lives that discounts adult students. Valerie's articulation of lowered expectations for her adult students recalls what Sissel et al. (2003) characterize as the deficitizing perception of adult undergraduates as "less than standard" (p. 25). Edward shared another perspective on student lives and priorities that aligns closely with these deficit constructions: "'How much you were expecting adult learners to do at home when they have lives as families, and workers, and husbands, and wives versus being intellectually or educationally responsible'" (242). Viewed through such a lens, students are always already constructed as less committed to and engaged with institutional learning culture, and with their own learning. Their time and efforts are situated outside this lens, thus mutually devalued and rendered invisible.

Andrew, a head administrator, also consistently emphasized the value he places on student responsiveness and communication, citing an external evaluator's report on how much more student-centered Andrew's campus is in relation to the other Mission University campuses in other states. He also discussed how much he learned from students when he used to teach at Mission, indicated, like Yara did about her St. Clare classes, that he would often come home after class and not be able to sleep because he was so inspired by the class conversation. When

discussing student utilization of academic resources, however, his answers were less specific, focusing instead on the limits of student out-of-school lives:

“Well again, you know, we’ve got a professional writing center and math lab, for example, to support our students. We’ve got the academic advising and some of the other pieces. I’d like to think that all our students would access them, those resources. And many do. But I think, for whatever reason...a number who do not access those things. And it impacts their learning, obviously. We try to, within that environment, within that model, business-ish, business like—again, it’s all about resources. And doing what you can with what you have. We are non-profit private university.” (Andrew, 086)

Andrew’s lack of specificity about students’ reasons for not accessing academic resources is noteworthy, given the multiple contexts and long tenure through which he has had the opportunity develop relationships with and knowledge about students. His answer also suggests a discursive move to either fill in or erase the gaps left by his lack of specific context, weighting his “for whatever reason” with an implication of student passivity or deficit (Bartlett, 2007; Weiler, 2001). His expressed desire to think that all students would access campus academic resources contradicts the academic centers’ limited schedules, which themselves limit possibilities for student access (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). By stressing the financial factors in institutional resource provision, his response may also be suggestive of an emphasis on students as being more responsible for accessing limited resources, rather than on the institution’s responsibility to students (Harper & Quaye, 2009)

Oliver is a St. Clare University advisor who works out of the state’s main campus but advised some students at this study’s branch campus depending on where students’ started the enrollment process. His work with these students was primarily due to staff limitations at St. Clare’s participating branch. He expressed a more nuanced perspective on student time management and the impact of out-of-school lives:

I would say the biggest challenge is time management. And then follow through on their part. Because when I meet with students and I say, “Hey, you have this opportunity to –” Like you mentioned, the CLEP exams. 50% of students’ eyes light up. “You mean I can test out of these? I don’t have to take these classes?” “Yeah, you can.” And then of that 50% where their eyes light up and it applies to them, maybe 10% will follow through and do that. So I guess it’s just...life happens. Other things get in the way. And you’re like, “Oh, I’ll have a lot of time to do this.” Well, six months go by; a year. “Well, you know what? I’m still up for two years’ worth of classes.” Plenty of time to do that. When you get in the routine – when you have your family commitments, your community commitments, your job, school – that time goes by really quickly. And then they’re in their final major class. And then they still have these electives and science credits that they still haven’t test out of. So I would say knowing what the resources are, and then having them follow up with it. Now again, all this goes back to them. They’re the ones responsible for it.” (56-59)

However, his example also tacitly speaks to the advising obstacles that St. Clare students articulated, ranging from lack of advisor knowledge and/or communication about precisely these time-sensitive issues to an inability to receive timely responses when they have questions or want to take a more proactive role in managing their academic requirements. In affirming student responsibility as the whole component of academic degree management, he, like other practitioners, minimize their and/or the institution’s own responsibilities to students, as well as minimizing the significance and implications of specifically institutional impediments to student time and degree management.

The aforementioned examples exemplify active student management of time as tied intricately into students’ learning practices, priorities, and out of school lives. As demonstrated by these practitioner vignettes, evaluative or nonspecific statements about student use of time contradicted the specificity of student reflections on the complexity of their lives, the high priority they assign to their college education, the costs of attending college as an adult, the sacrifices it entails, and the hard-won time that they devote to their learning in and out of the classroom. Students also emphasized prioritizing the harder and/or more time consuming way to do their homework, study, and participate in class, including predominantly choosing in-person

classes because they feel they push them more and offer a more enriching, challenging learning experience, despite the relative convenience of online courses. While some of these choices and practices are less visible in the classroom than others, their inextricability from student learning narratives suggests the need for more complex practitioner understanding of how student learning practices are situated within and across multiple subjectivities, and how these subjectivities motivate and enhance student learning, rather than limiting it. Findings also suggest the need for practitioners to take up more reflective learning stances toward their own biases and subjectivities, and how they influence ways in which practitioners recognize and frame student learning practices, choices, priorities, and commitments ((Brookfield, 2005; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

The complicated power dynamics that inflect adult learning classrooms require more nuanced practitioner attention to the multiplicity of micro and macro contexts that recursively inform and reproduce subjectivities and power, as well as the ways in which these systems and messages are reproduced in adult-specific college settings (Alfred, 2002; Brookfield, 2005; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). It also raises questions about how practitioners recognize and interact with pervasive higher education deficit ideologies regarding adult students, including how this interaction may inform or limit practitioner reflection on their subjectivities (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998). There is a need for greater understanding of how adult-serving postsecondary practitioners are acculturated to and, consciously or not, reinforce these deficit ideologies as mediated across their academic positionalities, perspectives, and practices (Alfred, 2002; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Donaldson & Graham, 1999, 2001; Graham et al., 2000; Janks, 2010).

Theme 2: The Role of Reflection in Adult Student Learning

This study's attention to the sociocultural and institutional contexts that influence student learning has highlighted ways in which students' accounts are situated, and sometimes contested, within their adult learning-focused institutions. The previous section examined students' articulated use of time, which emerged from this study as one of students' primary points of emphasis.

This section thus attends specifically to how students took up this study's interviews as opportunities to reflect further and expand on their articulated learning practices and priorities. This study's exploratory employment of a broadly phenomenographic perspective in its student interviews was intended to create conditions for students to decide if and how to bring into play conceptualizations of their learning practices, choices, and selves, as situated within their constellations of sociocultural spaces and experiences. It also privileged students' "way of experiencing" their learning, its influences, and its contexts (Marton & Booth, 1997; Tight, 2016). This reflects study commitment to understanding students' learning conceptualizations within their own meaning-making systems (Graham et al., 2000).

Student responses demonstrated alignment with two phenomenographic principles, that of conceptions as a central form of knowledge, and of knowledge demonstrating a relational and holistic nature (Tight, 2016, p. 323). In the course of their interviews, students also demonstrated a reflective approach to learning (Schön, 1983), sharing what Biesta and Tedder (2007) characterize as life narratives or stories, via which they shared and examined their experiences and conceptualizations of self in relation to their learning practices, choices, and purposes. In particular, students focused on the personal costs of prioritizing their college educations, and their willing sacrifices to maintain its centrality in their lives. These narratives challenge deficit perspectives that uphold traditional, residential college populations as an idealized standard for

time commitments, to which adult students are expected to strive but fail to meet. However, as illustrated in the prior section, this study's practitioners often framed student perspectives within such deficitizing frameworks. Thus revisiting select practitioner narratives here will help further contextualize the institutional learning cultures and messages in which students are situated.

Practitioners' Contradictory Perspectives on Students' Use of Time, Reflection, and Seriousness About College

The prior section on student use of time surfaced another theme, that of the role of self-reflection in participant interview responses. As noted prior, practitioners' deficitizing perspectives on students' time management were often contradicted within their own interview narrative by affirmative statements about students' learning efforts and practices. One difference noted in the types of talk that deficitized students was lesser emphasis on student-specific anecdotes and more emphasis on either practitioner-centric or generalized student statements. When practitioner talk did focus on individual students, or on a student-specific anecdote, their narrative tended to construct student issues with more nuance, if not affirmation.

For example, Floyd's interview responses demonstrate instances in which direct recounting of student encounters were framed in more positive ways than the generalized negative statement about students' use of time that was discussed in the prior section:

She was very quiet. And I heard she was very nervous about her final presentation. She's a nice student; she's going to be fine. And I said, "You're going to be okay." I said, "You're one of the best. I can't wait to hear this." And she did a wonderful job; she got an A on it. But after it was over with she sat down at her desk and I said, "See? You can have fun now; you can be happy again." The way she always is. She says, "No, I actually lost my sister-in-law earlier today." I said, "I'm sorry to hear that." I said, "You just proved that you can do an outstanding job no matter what's going on." She did a great job. (23200-24584)

Multiple differences from his other vignette can be observed. Most striking is his specific recounting of a student encounter, as opposed to the other vignette's more general reference to the "female" student population. He demonstrated attention to personal observation about his student's quietness before a presentation, as well as to other students' references to her nervousness. He situated these observations within a broader affirmation of this student as a "nice person" capable of succeeding in the presentation. Evidence of gendered constructions of student personality and behavior appear in play, although differently configured than in his other vignette. The complexity of these embedded linguistic constructions suggest a rich mine for discourse or dialogical analysis, both of which are beyond the scope of the present study. The implications of this vignette's specificity of student description in relation to his framing of students' learning acts and agency are, however, evident. Considered in relation to his prior vignette, he framed this reflection as an affirmation of student achievement in the face of obstacles, extending both an expectation and confirmation of her success despite having suffered a profound loss the same day as her presentation. He also emphasized his own role as interlocutor and champion of her success.

This vignette demonstrates multiple narrative repositionings of both Floyd and his student. He appears to have shifted from evaluative stance to a more relational one. He also expressed sensitivity toward and appreciation of students' out of class lives, further emphasizing the relational dynamics between him and this student. Finally, and most strikingly, his description of this student accounted for what might be considered a temporal perspective, in which the students' pre- and post-contexts were emphasized. The presentation itself was not described, but was instead framed within those phases as an assumed success. There was also affirmative recognition of domain of the personal, in which the student's experience of loss was not

dismissed as irrelevant to her successful presentation, but instead framed as a successfully navigated challenge.

The complex perspectives at play in this vignette, taken together with the prior vignette, in which Floyd discounted the impact of students' lives on their time and priorities, suggest the need for close attention to the influences on and instantiations of practitioner perceptions of students. Edward's interview responses surfaced similar contradictions. In his prior vignette, he framed an assumption of students' lack of campus resource utilization as the result of laziness. He did not take account of the multiple factors influencing students' ability to access campus resources. His response was also suggestive of a conflation of campus resource utilization with student commitment, engagement, self-efficacy, and, ultimately, seriousness about their learning.

In another excerpt, however, he affirmed students' dedication of time and effort amidst overburdened schedules:

What they do well is, by and large, they bring in their willingness and their dedication to their schooling, to get that degree. Their time, a lot of students – some students will travel for two hours after work to be here. I do know that they do well at putting in their time to study, by and large. So what I perceive is that they are interested, they're concerned. They're extremely concerned about their grade. They really want to do well.

Edward's statements about students' "putting in their time to study, by and large," contradicts his prior assertion of student laziness. Also, while not as student-specific as Floyd's example above, it demonstrates specific attention to an observed student life feature, that of their lengthy commutes. This specificity of attention suggests Edward's associated understanding of the extraordinary academic commitment that these commutes represent. Through that acknowledgement, Edward thus repositions students' lives as complex and relevant to their academic choices and participation. It also reframes students' time spent in class and on homework as functions of sacrifice and commitment.

These two examples highlighted the facilitative role that student-specific examples contributed to practitioner responses. This is not to say that more abstract talk about perspectives or experiences was consistently tied to deficitizing students in their narrative. However, an example from Andrew's interview highlights one of the ways in which shifts away from either student-specific or site-specific examples may be interpreted to function.

It is first important to note that Andrew's interview responses were overwhelmingly positive toward students, and he often contextualized his perspectives by affirming his commitment to andragogical principles and to building a highly collaborative culture. While his role as the campus executive oriented his focus on his leadership style and contexts, including the management aspects of leading a small adult-focused campus, he emphasized, "I think culture trumps strategy in many cases. If you can build that powerful culture, because it's self-sustaining, it's adjustable, it's resilient. It's powerful" (129). He went on to link his perspectives on culture to the powerful experiences he's shared with colleagues and students: "I mean I've had experiences here that have brought me to tears. I've had experiences here that I've laughed my head off. We've done so many great things here" (129).

An interesting shift marks his next statements: "I've been able to teach internationally, for our international program, where I taught in Singapore [a pseudonymous location], and had a class of individuals who, in some cases, drove two hours there, two hours back, every day to learn. And so to see that level of motivation, to see that understanding of how powerful education can be in transforming lives was just magical" (Andrew, 129). It must be noted that he immediately returns to accounts of experiences he shared with students at Mission at this point in his narrative, including a moving example of a student committed to earning her degree despite a terminal cancer diagnosis. However, this shift signaled an emphasis both on the practice opportunities that his leadership role at Mission afforded him, as well as the motivation and

dedication of the students he taught in Singapore. His incorporation of this international experience illustrates a high value placed on different cultural perspectives and practices, which is shared both other practitioners and especially by students. However, it also recalls his statements featured in the prior section on time management, about Mission students minimizing their learning if they don't take advantage of campus resources. Taken together, these shifts are perhaps suggestive of a different bar held for Mission's adult students who, in his leadership perspective, are afforded great opportunity to supplement their course learning, at less personal cost than the students he taught in Singapore who faced significant impediments to accessing educational sites at all. However, the prior section on student use of time, as well as the student findings at both sites, all serve to illustrate the sacrifices and arduous schedules that students willingly take up in pursuit of their college degrees.

Students' Reflective Learning Narratives

Despite practitioner characterization of students' learning and engagement as either limited or insufficiently prioritized, students consistently demonstrated a critical, reflective learning stance throughout their interview narratives, in ways suggestive of deep, vulnerable thinking about themselves, about others, and about the meanings and purposes of their college educations. Even more casual discussions signaled a move toward self-reflection. For instance, when discussing an introductory course, Faith reflected on what the class meant for her, not just what it entailed: "As for the self-reflection, yeah, that was kind of nice. It made me realize that some of my things that just kind of seem like personality traits can be hugely beneficial" (Faith, 037).

Vulnerability. Perhaps the most consistent characteristic of students' self-reflection was their willingness to be vulnerable and talk about difficult, challenging, or even self-critical issues or characteristics. As the prior findings demonstrated, however, this should not be a surprise;

students uniformly showed mutual willingness to and interest in talking self-critically and reflectively. With regard to the more extended discussions aligning with theme of self-reflection, student responses demonstrate not merely self-disclosure, but, rather, a deeper discussion oriented toward what they did or could still learn about how to re-focus or reframe their perspectives going forward.

For example, Yara talked about how she learned from an unexpectedly emotional presentation experience, despite having felt prepared:

The first presentation that I had to do in D's class, I knew this information like the back of my hand. There is absolutely no way I would've ever had to do any type of research on it whatsoever. I just knew it. And I got up there and froze. I couldn't remember what I wanted to talk about, or why I wanted to talk about it. Or what the actual – I got overcome with every type of emotion under the sun and thought that I completely bombed it. And walked away from that with an a-ha of, "You know what [Yara]? Give yourself little key points and notes, because no matter how well you know the information, anything can throw you off. So that was my favorite memory, because it was my scariest moment here...And my most enlightening moment. (Yara, 304-307)

In contrast with having elsewhere described grades as important to her as markers of her successful academic progress, she articulated that the progress itself is representative of a deep and lifelong endeavor. She described learning as a constant, often surprising process embedded in and drawing on every aspect of her life. Her willingness to be vulnerable, and to look as closely at her failures as at her successes, are indicative of her commitment to making the most of her learning in college.

Hannah identified the need to be personally vulnerable as essential to her learning. She discussed difficulties in her current relationship, emphasizing how it complicates the challenges she already faces as she cares for her new baby, works, and attends school.

But when you're 35, 40 years old and you've got two marriages under your belt and you're on your third and you've had all these life experiences, nobody's going to change your mind unless they have proof. Or a real life scenario or situation or example that can make you go, "Okay. Another way to look at it." And that's what I've found. Because I

came into it with that mentality of, “Well I’ve experienced it, and it doesn’t happen that way.” Or, “It can’t happen that way.”...But when an instructor or somebody else in class says, “A-ha, but actually it does, and here’s an example.” Then you have to let your guard down and go, “Hm.” And I think that that just strengthens you to be able to move forward personally and professionally. Because now you have more ways to look at situations, and make different decisions than you might have made. And maybe yours were still right, but maybe some of these other ways worked better in different scenarios. And you’re not continually going back to the same thing you know because it’s the only thing you know. (Hannah, 164)

In this reflection, Hannah assigns value to looking back on prior relationship challenges, and connecting those experiences and lessons to better understanding how they have informed her learning attitudes. In doing so, she emphasized her need to process even painful experiences to help push forward in her ongoing inside and outside the classroom. She also frames a need to “let your guard down,” an explicit statement of vulnerability, as central to critical thinking and self-reflective learning.

From a more specifically academic standpoint, Faith demonstrated vulnerability in reflecting on the biases she brought to one course. Her reflection connected back to her earlier mentions about feeling confident about her writing skills, toward a more nuanced reflection on her academic decision-making and attitudes toward learning:

I actually tried to drop that class because I looked at the textbook and said, ‘I learned a lot of this stuff already.’ When they said that it completes a few different requirements and you really need to take this class I said okay. I told myself that there had to be other things in there that I had not yet learned. I looked for those things. Which, now that I think about it, may have been a little bit of a mistake. Because when I didn’t find them in one week I’d be like (funny noise). I don’t know. I went in to it assuming that I wasn’t going to learn too much, but hoping to find some things that I’d learn, I guess. Which I did. (Faith, 309-310)

Faith’s response illuminated a realization that an affirmative conceptualization of oneself as a prepared and/or dedicated learner is not an end goal, but rather a platform for seeking out new ways to learn, even from seemingly well-trod or irrelevant sources and contexts. In general, study findings suggest that affirmation does not appear to be the goal of student self-reflection, despite this study’s interview questions about student strengths. Instead, findings demonstrate that

student self-affirmation was largely framed as starting point for deeper, more critical and reflective learning.

The costs and rewards of adult college-going. Even when student responses are strongly self-affirmative, their interview responses tend to transition, either in those moments or as the interview progresses, toward a focus on their anxieties, weaknesses, or challenges. This ties into the prior section's discussion of vulnerability in students' reflective learning narratives. Chapter 4's discussion of learning practices includes a good example from Elyse, in which she affirmed herself as a strong and confident writer, but toward discussing her desire to focus more on developing her presentation skills, about which she feels much less prepared and confident.

As another example, Yara talked about her 4.0 average and the "phenomenal" opportunity she's had to be successful in college, but she contextualized it within a broader picture of her full-time job and raising four children on her own. She also addressed the costs and affordances of college as an adult:

I take it seriously. I think that is probably the best example I can. I don't come in with a very, man, I gotta be at school today. Or, ugh, this topic is stupid. I take a very positive approach to the information that I'm gonna be learning because I know I've been up since 4:30, five o'clock in the morning. I know I'm gonna be here til ten o'clock at night. And I know that I'm gonna be learning in what night what people learn in a month. So coming in with this ugh attitude – I don't care what happened all day long. When I step through that door, I just need to be positive and serious about what I'm doing. But still be able to laugh about stuff. So I try to make my learning experience as fun and positive as possible. (Yara, 302-304)

The sacrifices and tensions that accompany adult college-going didn't, for Yara, dampen her seriousness about college. She demonstrated a reflexive approach to her learning, emphasizing the privileges of being able to learn so intensively and her desire to make the most of it. In particular, she took on responsibility for the quality and orientation of her learning, even as the greatest challenges she faced stemmed from the unique pressures of intensive, evening course-based adult college programs.

Nina's discussion of her capstone project also demonstrated a reflexive stance toward her academic achievements. When describing what that project meant to her, she noted her exemplary grade. However, her emphasis on the grade suggested it was ultimately because, for her, it stands as evidence of her struggling within a complex project and succeeding in meeting college expectations.

I would say – I think my capstone I'm pretty excited about because, again, reflection of all that I've gone through within the program. I got an A on it. It's one that the instructor asked for permission to show with other students as a sample. And so it was good because the syllabus suggested you take a not for profit. And I was the only one in class that took a not for profit... So there was then some struggles with it when it came to financials and different things that were part of the paper... But it was interesting to be able to approach it and find out that I approached it in the way in which it was expected. So I would say, to me, that's kind of the final marking of getting through the program. And again, just being able to demonstrate the topics from past classes that really were intertwined within that paper. And feeling good about what I learned, and the fact that I retained it, and I could continue to use is to make it supportive in the paper. (Nina, 118-123)

Nina emphasizes the rewards of the capstone process as much as its successful completion. She notes that she felt good about receiving an A that her instructor found it strong enough to serve as a model for future students' endeavors. However, she frames her achievement as representative of the enrichment and motivation she found in crafting a final, intensive project encompassing the interdisciplinary, cumulative learning she developed over four and a half years at St. Clare.

Making learning personal. The vulnerability expressed by students was often personal in nature, while also resisting dichotomies between the personal and the academic (Alfred, 2002b; Biesta & Tedder, 2007). For example, Nina emphasized her negotiation of her professional, family, and academic responsibilities, noting that guilt emerged as a major challenge when she started college:

Think there's times in the beginning of feeling guilty when you were doing something that wasn't school related or work related. And then not even enjoying that time because all you're thinking about is what you should be doing. And then when you're doing your homework you're thinking you should have spent more time with this person. Or more

quality time. So I think it's been more about making quality out of it, and just appreciating what you can do in that amount of time. (Nina, 029)

Her willingness to discuss, here and elsewhere, the impact of guilt on her life lends dimension to some practitioner characterizations of students as either committed or not. While Nina's interview did not address the kind of personal challenges that are discussed in relation to Ella later in this chapter, she speaks to a subtle yet pervasive challenge that affected her academic practices, her focus, and her sense of identity as a student, mother, and professional. Interestingly, it is by tapping more deeply into the experience of being a student that she found a way to work through the guilt. She notes that she was influenced by advice she heard in class about mindfulness and being present. In this excerpt, she reflects on how giving herself permission to focus on school enabled her to get the most out of it.

Odette shared an example of a project that required her to reconnect with a time period in her life in which she was particularly vulnerable. Describing a writing assignment in which she interviewed a much-admired mentor she met while volunteering, Odette revealed:

It had a big effect on me. But it was really hard though. How do I state this? And I thought, well, I can only do it organically. I can only do it the way I think about it. That's the way I wrap my brain around it. Let me tell how I got there. B said something about – when she gave me her feedback – she said something about how neat it was that she seemed in tune to the fact that I was in a fragile state...that woman was there for you when you were in such a fragile state. She used the word fragile. And I thought, you know, B's actually right; I was in a pretty fragile state. Outwardly, no...But really I was. And I don't know if I hadn't been that fragile if I would have even picked up on her. (Odette, 131-134)

This example illustrates Odette's reflective stance toward a vulnerable emotional period in her life, framing this vulnerability as an opening through which her bond with her mentor was deepened. She also framed this vulnerability as terrain for the mutually personal and academic reflection on how to do justice to her mentor's life and impact. She expressed a connection between her goals for her interview project and the ways in which her personal meaning-making represented a deeper way "in" to her narrative (Biesta & Tedder, 2007).

Interestingly, there was one discipline, religion, in which Odette made a distinction between the personal and the academic (the latter of which she framed as a function of logic or reason). She described her worry upon entering college that she would not be open-minded about non-Western religions (she identified having a religious “philosophy” but not specifically naming a religious affiliation):

I was worried going into school...would I be open minded enough? That you get to a certain point in your career and life and it's teaching an old dog new tricks kind of thing. But I've been real open to all of this. I like hearing what different people have to say on subjects. I was more open-minded than I thought I'd be. I was worried that there'd be certain subjects that I wouldn't embrace...But for the most part though – I didn't know how I would feel about non-Western religions. It's not that I'm not interested in learning about them – because I am – but would it hold my interest? I have certain ideas about my own religious philosophy, if you will...But, you know, it's held my interest more than I thought it would. I guess I'm more receptive to new ideas than I thought I'd be. (008-013)

In so doing, she articulated a perspective on looking beyond personal affiliations or biases as a way of opening up to religious perspectives, ideologies, or paradigms that she has limited experience with or may disagree with:

I'm thinking of this class right now. I've been – you know, people are injecting their own religious beliefs and ideals into this class. And I'm not – you know, some of them are pretty judgmental. I'm just seeing it purely as a learning experience. I was surprised that people weren't more academic about it. Instead they were kind of imposing their own beliefs and judgments on their answers. We have to do this online discussion post. And everyone is wonderfully polite to each other. But then it's followed by, “Well this is my own beliefs, and this bothers me.” They inject their own judgments into it. I thought, “Well, that's interesting.” I guess that's the way they learn; they're personally attaching themselves to it. I don't know. If anything surprised me, it's how candid people are, and how much they inject their own emotions. Some people are very logical and I guess a little bit more academic or reason based. (019)

She did not draw direct parallels between this perspective and her aforementioned worries about whether she would be open-minded enough in college, and particularly about non-dominant religions and cultures. She also did not prioritize her own “religious philosophy” in the interviews, only mentioning it once. Instead, she demonstrated a complicated mediation of contexts as well as positionalities, between the personal and the academic or “logical” in the

context of this religion course. However, she delved into the intersections between the two in her writing course. These complex mediations of academic and personal contexts, subjectivities, and goals may be understood in terms waiting to enter a topic or course conversation until she has a better understanding of the topic, and of how she might position herself in relation to it. By strategically parsing the domain of the personal, she may permit herself more time to reflect on how she is making meaning in and about the course.

Diversity. Kira reflected on the importance of diversity in her own learning, connecting it back, like Gina does, to her personal connection to cross-cultural issues as a student who moved to the US specifically for college. She also emphasizes how she sees diversity as both valuable and necessary to business education and workplace contexts.

And about the information that I gained, I think it's very interesting how much – to overcome diversity issues, how much people need to be open and appreciate differences. How can companies influence that through diversity programs? Like training, lecturing, seminars; anything your company ordered. Human resources department can help with it. The employees do too. To be open minded to diversity. And respect and show others... We studied a lot about diversity. Because diversity can be related to cultural defenses. But nowadays, because of the demographics of American workers, diversity relates to age, race, religion, gender. So all the time we studied diversity. That's what it's all about. In management course you're always learning how to deal with people. And people are different from you. So you see that all the time. (Kira, 103-105)

She further contextualizes the mutual importance and influence of her positionality as an international student by highlighting the aspect of “otherness” in the context of her interest in conflict resolution:

Because people usually see conflicts as a negative process, and I learned how to see it as a positive one. If you focus on the opportunities that you have to realign a relationship. And I think I had a project that I had to talk about this conflict, and [inaudible 00:48:57] a conflict that I had in my past. So I think I contributed with my experience, and my new perspective of a conflict. And of their conflict. And how different I would react to such situations nowadays after I took the class. And I think I also contributed with my international pursuit of my degree. Because people, when they look at you – that's the feeling that I have. They usually tend to judge you as you were a minority. You barely speak English and you have a very strong accent. But as you speak, that you are – as I spoke – that I was here pursuing a dream of getting an international education. My

struggle is so different from the others, that live here. My struggles as an international student, I think I contributed as a way to – cultural exchange information. And from different perspective of what being a foreigner is at school. What it means to be the other perspective from the aliens around you. They are pursuing education. (Kira, 149)

This reflection suggests provocative engagement with notions of conflict, discomfort, and cultural and national minority identification. She asserts a framework of cultural exchange as opposed to transmission or competence, and constructs a complex narrative of her learning both in and about her institutional culture. Kira's narrative also reflects the ways in which she has positioned herself amidst the classroom's deficitizing cultural assumptions, biases, and judgments, taking on responsibility for educating her peers as well as herself. Her framing of "the aliens around you" is especially striking, signaling an agentic reclaiming of an explicitly othering term and turning it back to her classmates and instructors as a challenge to their own false assumption of neutrality or normative identity as learners (Bartlett, 2007; Harper, 2012; Weiler, 2001). In so doing, she also suggested a challenge to them to adopt a critical, reflective stance on their own identities and biases, as mutually constructed within and by the collective classroom cultures.

Other students identified diversity and cultural exchange as playing significant roles in their learning choices, self-identification, and experiences. Tony offered multiple perspectives on his experiences discussing diverse topics in class. In particular, he reflected on a group project on diversity in the workplace, citing it as the one he is proudest of. He noted that his professional experience, managing projects in a multinational corporation, brought diversity issues to the forefront and motivated him to prioritize them more in school as well as work. Describing some of the critical responses he heard from classmates after the presentation, he contextualized them in relation to what he has heard in the workplace:

It was different, but it's nothing that I haven't dealt with here...I got the occasional... "How come we can't have the white man's club?" I said, "You can! (laughter continues) Go submit your request for it!" That's going to go over well. Or, why do you need to get up in a group? I said, well it's not that. You know, I told them, "It's not just Hispanics there. There's Asians and there's Indians in there. There's all kind

of ethnic backgrounds. There's not – (talking as other person) then, I'm not going. Well then, don't go! You can go to whatever you want. If you want to start your own group, start your own group. I will show up. But we don't need a group. (Both laugh) But there's students that are giving me a hard time.” (Tony, 539-542)

He went on to further contextualize the “hard time” some classmates gave him, highlighting his own process of self-identification as a Hispanic man: “But no. I do get – I understand it sometimes. I used to think the same way. I was like, “Well why do I want to be associated in a group?” It kind of turns me off, I guess.” (Tony, 547). This personal reflection shows willingness to empathize with his classmates’ perspectives, as well as an interpretation of those perspectives as extensions of a desire for or alignment with individualism that is more easily afforded to students or colleagues who are not minoritized in school or society. Yet it is his evolution toward greater emphasis on community, relationships, and reciprocity that underpin Tony’s broader conceptualization of his intersecting cultural, academic, and professional identities:

The aspect of getting involved. I realized, hey, I made it here because somebody gave me a chance. Somebody thought that I could do it. And if I can help somebody else, whether it might not be smart – it might not cost me anything, but to somebody else it might help them out more than myself. And I think now, where I'm at in my life, I think fine. That's where I'm at. I don't – sure I'd like to improve myself, but I can help someone else too. (Tony, 549)

Tony’s desire to empathize with and help others as part of his own academic and professional trajectory extended into his personal life as well, including his commitments to volunteer work and his family’s increasing involvement with foreign exchange student programs.

Among white study participants, cross-cultural learning and international contexts figured most prominently in Ingrid’s experience and reflections, although Yara and Odette also addressed them. Grace, as will be discussed subsequently, also spoke at length about multicultural issues, but in the context of the US. Ingrid reflected multiple times throughout her interview on the impact and rewards of an extensive group project conducted in collaboration with students from Macedonia:

“...the U.S. Regions in the Balkans – I fell in love with that class. It was an experience because I had never been to that country. I didn’t know a lot about the religions. I didn’t know much about the people, the history, so on and so forth. So what we had to do is, each week...it was very interactive....the students from Macedonia and the students in the United States had to create this huge PowerPoint together. Now they’re in Macedonia and we’re here. We collaborated. We worked on – and I literally, I had gone back to that class the Blackboards show to look at it; I downloaded it into my Dropbox so I have it forever. They gave us topics that we discussed; from religion, government, personal – how we think of different people. What we think of – like, here in America, what they thought about Americans and what we think about Muslim people. And we really discussed it in the discussion board. And there was no topic that was unacceptable. Everybody was respectful, and it was a candid conversation, that we really got to know each other. And then we did Zoom conversations. So we literally talked like we are. And they are – so right now it is morning, very early morning, over there. So we had to find the times that we could do this together. And this PowerPoint, so each topic every week, we had to find photos and things to represent our thoughts. And then we had to caption them. Why they were important. And then we critiqued them. So it really turned into a mosaic of cross-cultural thoughts. And it just – I was really sad to see that class end. And in fact, I’m still friends with some of the classmates on Facebook.” (Ingrid, 066-075)

Ingrid’s description of her collaborative cross-cultural learning experiences as a “mosaic,” and her emphasis on relationships that were formed and maintained beyond the conclusion of this project, reflected a nuanced conceptualization of cultural exchange, collaboration, and reciprocity. Her demonstrated engagement with the notion of cultural exchange also aligns with Kira advocated approach to multicultural learning in the classroom. Gina, Tony, Paula, and Kira reflected elsewhere on the tensions embedded in their decisions whether and how to participate in class, especially concerning issues of cultural representation and positionality. Their articulated experiences lend more significance to the ways in which white classmates engage or challenge cultural norms in their predominantly white classroom culture. Ingrid’s reflection appears to demonstrate her engagement with some of these issues, including her emphasis on making her American subjectivities and biases transparent as part of her collaborative project’s cultural exchange.

As noted in the prior findings chapters, students consistently identified the value of different perspectives and identities in shaping their learning. However, findings showed that specific discussions about racial, ethnic, or other forms of cultural diversity came more from the

students who self-identified African, Hispanic, Asian, and Latina backgrounds than from the white students. This is suggestive of the disproportionate onus of self-representation placed on students from non-dominant or marginalized identities within predominantly white institutions (Alfred, 2002; Harper, 2012, 2013). Grace reflected on a challenging class encounter that demonstrates some of the tensions between white students' affirmation of difference in their learning paradigm and their individual discomfort with diverse perspectives or cultures:

A lot of diversity in the classes that I was not used to. And so for those types of things, I did not feel very comfortable. However, the more I got to know my fellow students, I felt like no question I'm going to ask is going to be stupid. A couple of times I did say something and I remember one student in the class was like, "Really? You're going into human services?" And it was really disturbing. When I heard that. It was a topic that we were talking about that I felt very, very strongly against. And my instructor felt the opposite of me, and what I did. And it got very heated. (057)

She went on to identify the primary source of discomfort as with her instructor, noting that she didn't believe that the "outburst" from the other student was handled appropriately. She notes that she felt so upset that, "I seriously started to cry in class. And that's not a learning experience I ever want again. And that has never happened again. I think it was just this instructor and myself; we never got along. We just never really see eye to eye." (Grace, 057) She raised this example as a way of illustrating how she evolved from this early Mission University encounter toward a more comfortable stance toward challenging topics. She also notes that she became comfortable with coming into class from a position of not knowing, but being open to learning and making herself vulnerable in the process. She mentions that she has always been a shy person, making encounters like this especially challenging for her. Yet she ultimately affirms these moments of discomfort as pivotal in her realization that asking questions about unfamiliar topics and cultures is "the only way I'm going to learn." (Grace, 057)

It should be noted that she raises similar questions in a later class example, in which she specifically discusses her unfamiliarity with what she perceives as African American "slang":

For example, a diverse group that an African American woman was in my class. Actually there's two African Americans in one of my classes. And the instructor was talking about slang, and using terminology that certain African Americans would use. And I was very concerned about how do you know to talk that way. I said, "That is not what I grew up with. That is just not my culture. And so for me to actually learn those things, how do you do that?" And one girl, one of the African Americans in my class, she had said to me, she was like, "Don't you have any black friends?" And I said, "No." And I said, "It's not that I don't want them. It's just I ... north of [distant, rural town]. I don't have the opportunity." (Grace, 060-061)

First, this example may be understood to demonstrate more awareness of her limitations and positionality. It also suggests more openness toward correcting those limitations. She noted that this encounter took place after the aforementioned class, in which she felt overwhelmed by her opposition to the unspecified diversity topic as well as her instructor's and classmates' disagreement. Complicating her demonstration of a shifting sense of positionality is the way her language frames her classmates and, it may be assumed, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), in ways suggestive of a misapprehension and deficitizing bias against AAVE. So, too, does her response to her classmates' engagement of her questions: "And so it wasn't the response that I thought that she would say to me, but she said to me, she was like, "You know what girl? You just keep being as sweet as you are, and you're going to learn those things." So it was like, "Well thank you." (Grace, 061) She concludes that this exchange with her classmate, and her growing sense of comfort in classes that challenge her beliefs and experiences, all contribute to deeper learning:

You have come so far in here." She said, "I remember that night you cried in class." And she said, "Now you're getting up in front of class and you're just saying things like it is, and you're just going with it." And so that made me feel good, because I know that going to school has helped me tremendously. In so many different areas of my life. Just really making me feel like I'm believing in myself, where I never really did before. Because I work. That's all I do. (Grace, 061)

Her commitment to pushing her learning and her comfort zone is reflected here. So, too, does the value she assigned to having her development affirmed by her classmates, from whom she looks to as resources for her learning.

However, linking back to Gina's and Tony's reflections on the roles they took up in class to bring more diverse perspectives, Grace's reflections on her evolution as a learner also raise questions about the disproportionate responsibility assigned to students of color in educating their white classmates. The small cohort and class size at Sites 1 and 2, coupled with their predominant white student populations, intensify these contexts for student participants. Grace's interactions with her Black classmates suggests an evolution in her orientation toward different perspectives as enlarging, rather than merely challenging, her learning. However, in her reflection, she articulated valuing the affirmation of her Black classmates, as opposed to dialogue; it is unclear what kind of discussion may have ensued to challenge or inform her learning regarding AAVE, for instance. The role that Grace described herself as occupying in the classroom, and the roles she frames for her classmates of color, are suggestive of framing minoritized students simultaneously more visible in the classroom, positioned as representatives of their race, ethnicity, or culture, yet also positioned as an "other" (Alfred, 2002, 2002b; Harper, 2012, 2013).

Zoe, who served as an advisor as well as instructor, commented on this dynamic as well. She talked throughout her interview about her own positioning within St. Clare's campus as a Black practitioner, focusing on how her positionality made her more attentive to differences between the ways in which her Black and white students positioned themselves in the classroom:

A lot of Caucasians—and I've been in the classroom now, and I've taught maybe eight classes now, so I've got a blend of it—they're more open with sharing their stories and they're struggles, and what-have-you-not. Not so much with the African-Americans until they become comfortable in the classroom. Once they start building that confidence within themselves, then they're more vocal. Now they can find their place within the classroom. But to me, I find that it takes about two classes before they can do that. (Zoe, 055)

Paula expressed feeling the way Zoe described. She recounted an incident in class arising from discussing a text about how slavery and racism informed social interactions. It should be noted that this event sounds similar to the one Grace described. Yet without confirming details in her or

Paula's reflection as evidence, no correlation or causation can be claimed. However, for the purposes of this study, they may be broadly framed as constitutive parts of a larger study narrative to which each student contributed. Paula describes a class dynamic in which there was active engagement with text about racism and social interaction, a context in which she originally felt comfortable participating. She recalled her response to the text's descriptions of a Black man talking to his son about his encounter with a white shopkeeper who called all Black customers by the same name. She explained that she wanted to engage with this character's emphasis on his son not responding if he found himself in similar situations:

I was saying that back in that time, I probably wouldn't have said anything either. Because you don't know what they'll do to you. You don't know what they'll do to your children, you don't know what they'll do to your family. And this is a really successful Black man; African American. You don't want to cause friction for yourself or your family. Because sometimes what you say, it'll trickle down to your family, and they'll be affected by it. (Paula, 109)

One of Paula's white classmates responded that her father would have said something, though it is unclear from the context of the interview transcript whether she observed that her father would have shared similar racist behavior or he would have challenged the white shopkeeper. Paula described the subsequent class response: "So me and the teacher were having dialect back and forth, and she was involved in the dialect. And she took it personally. And she felt like we were attacking her." (109). While emphasizing what she thought was a "good rapport" among the teacher and the class, she also described feeling responsible for the tension or discomfort that her white classmate felt: "So long story short, I felt compelled to call her. So I called her" (109). However, her classmate responded by questioning why Paula called; Paula recalled her as sounding insulted by the call. That student subsequently dropped the class. Paula observed that after this incident, a faculty member or administrator sat in on the class. She described the effect of this experience on her subsequent approach to class engagement: "I more sit back and listen. And see what other people have to say. And depending on what the conversation is about, and

depending on how the person is, I might just sit back and listen and then express myself. But not let it be – if it’s even appearing to be a debate. You know what I mean? If it even appears to be a debate I won’t even say anything” (114-115). Despite having taken up responsibility for bringing an underrepresented perspective with her class—and despite having assumed additional responsibility for her white classmate’s discomfort, extending significant relational and empathetic overtures—Paula’s role in her classes remained imprinted by the risks and costs that minoritized students disproportionately shoulder in predominantly white classrooms (Harper, 2012, 2013; Harper & Quaye, 2009).

From her different vantage point as an international student, Kira also described having to adapt her body language and communication style when transitioning from Brazil to college in the US, including learning to smile less to not expecting a response when she says hello. She also observes that faculty members were important to helping her navigate class conversations: “They don’t wait for their turn to talk. And I struggled with that. Because it’s hard for me to raise my voice when other people are talking. And it’s a little bit intimidating because of my accent...so I always raise my hand. But nobody respects having your hand raised. And they just – “Okay, let her speak.” Some instructors do say that.” (Kira, 065b)

Taken together, these reflections demonstrate a double standard for white and minoritized student participation and positioning in the classroom. It is also suggestive of a deeper disconnect between constructions of and student value placed on difference and on specific representations of minoritized identities (Harper, 2012, 2013). It complicates the ways in which students’ valuing of difference as critical to their learning is understood. It also suggests the need for closer attention to how culture, race, and difference are constructed and engaged in predominantly white adult learning-focused classrooms. It also complicates the interplay between adult learning-focused instruction’s emphasis on collaborative learning and the ways in which minoritized

students are positioned in predominantly white classes. These complexities and tensions suggest obstacles to minoritized students' ability to be vulnerable and open in the classroom's and, by extension, the institution's learning culture. It also suggests greater risks of practitioners perceiving minoritized students' class participation, in contexts elucidated by Zoe and Paula, as reflective of lesser engagement or seriousness (Alfred, 2002; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Reason & Evans, 2007).

The specific adult learning-focused contexts for these disparities also require attention. These institutions represent a democratizing stake in the landscape of higher education by affirming the collective intellectual, social, and experiential contributions of adult undergraduates, a rapidly growing student population that remains poorly served in traditional institutions (Brookfield & Holst, 2011). However, they are not immune to the reproduction of deficit ideologies and conditions. Requiring particular attention is how difference and diversity are constructed in adult-specific classroom discourse and, more broadly, within the adult-specific institutional learning culture. Of significance is Hikido and Murray's (2015) analysis of how white students' postsecondary discourses around diversity and inclusion simultaneously evade and reinforce white dominance. This aligns with Harper's (2012) discussion of how generalized engagement with race without critical interrogation of systemic racism serves to reinforce deficitizing norms. Alfred (2002) suggests a reframing of the ways in which organizations take up the complex issues of multiculturalism with "a critical eye and a cautious heart" (p. 92). Students like Tony, Paula, Kira, and Gina demonstrated the urgency as well as the possibilities for changing ways in which their predominantly white adult learning-focused institutions engage issues of difference, diversity, race, and culture. As Alfred (2002) asserts, "[I]nstead of promoting diversity, organizational members should promote equality by challenging taken-for-granted cultural norms and practices" (p. 92).

Identification and empathy. The final theme in this chapter is how students exemplified the concepts of identification with and empathy for others in their reflective learning narratives. Prominent in Tony's reflections, it is also evident in other students' reflections outside the contexts of diversity and equity. For example, Hannah's reflection on the value of cross-generational learning affirmed the need for empathy as well as attention to personal biases and relational factors:

"We judge way too much in society. First impressions are big. Yes. But I'm also about the second impression. Because sometimes the first impression just does not go the way you want it to... So you may have not come off as my favorite person the first time around, but you know what? I'm going to give it another chance, because maybe your approaching me was nerve wracking; or maybe you just came off of an argument with somebody and you were steaming and you came at me. I don't take things personally, and I certainly don't judge on the first meeting. I wait to feel it out a little bit before I make decisions on people. And then I still do my best to get along with people even if I don't care for them. You can't like everybody but you have to try to get along with people." (Hannah, 189-191)

From a different perspective, Faith reflected on what a second chance has meant for her as a learner:

I went to [state university] for three semesters after I graduated high school. My third semester I had some things come up in my life and I just stopped going, instead of telling anybody. I had a pretty bad GPA due to that. They didn't even really consider me. [St. Clare] gave me a chance to show that I'm actually a good student; I just made some bad decisions. That's part of it. Since I've gotten here it's been really nice. (023-024)

Both Hannah and Faith demonstrated individual reflective learning stances that embraced difficulty. They also affirmed the role that opportunity plays in learning. Their reflections suggested, overall, the need to enlarge social constructions of who is eligible for, capable of being successful in, and deserving of college opportunity and success.

In this chapter's final example, Ella reflected on her decision to pursue a social work degree as informed by identification with and empathy for vulnerable teens. There are tensions embedded in that identification, however; she opened this discussion by differentiating herself

from her perceived population of focus, explaining that “my mother and father are still married; they just celebrated 40 years. I don’t come from a broken, divorced, economically poverty stricken family. Or social – it’s a middle class. Upper – not upper, but it’s a middle class family. So I didn’t have the life struggles of being in the streets or in the ghetto” (Ella, 042). Embedded in this personal reflection is an element of othering family structures and neighborhoods different from her own. At the same time, she identifies how she’s been privileged by her upbringing and, tacitly, whiteness. Similarly complex tensions between acknowledging and reifying privileges and difference were observed in Grace’s and Valerie’s reflections. As Ella’s reflection suggests, there are also tensions mediated across conceptualization of identification and empathy.

In reflecting more deeply on her own experience, she demonstrated a shift in focus away from generalizations about the sociocultural and economic locations of poverty, toward a more complex picture of how her out-of-school life affected her college trajectory prior to enrolling at Mission:

In high school I did kind of go with the wrong crowd. So if I experimented in illegal substances – it happened. So I’m like, “Well I can help them with this because I’ve been on that road.” But I was like I never did anything heavy. Your heroin addicts, or meth addicts; I never did that, so I couldn’t help in that aspect. The more I started thinking about it I’m like, “I don’t know.” And then I had three – yup. Three life changing events that happened in college with led, essentially, to me just basically giving up on myself. Not caring. I stopped going to classes, so my grades obviously declined. I was emotionally distraught. And led me to go through to the board. The board looked at me. And everything I talked that day to them about was them saying, “You know, you really sound like you’re interested in criminal justice. Why don’t you try it? Give that a try.” (Ella, 042)

Ella framed her narrative as how she came to find her way into Mission. In doing so, she narratively reclaimed and reoriented her journey toward an academic and professional path that has inspired her confidence, excitement, and commitment. In so doing, she offered a valuable, nuanced perspective that isn’t as strongly represented in this study’s practitioner discussions of student lives and practices. For example, Ian is a Mission University instructor with a counseling

psychology background who talked enthusiastically about how interesting, diverse, complex, and dedicated he finds Mission students. He also expressed empathy with students' out-of-school lives and responsibilities, observing that students often come to him if they are running into obstacles or facing a crisis, such as domestic violence and deaths in the family. Even within a strongly affirming interview narrative, however, frames student absence or withdrawal as a function of engagement, as opposed to the more complex picture he described throughout the rest of his interview:

“There’s a good feeling. It’s like...we’re in this together, learning this together. I think that helps with the quality of work too. I think the effort is high. It’s been rare when the effort’s been low. Oftentimes what you’ll see when the effort is low is someone either skipping a class – there’s eight classes that you would come to during a term. You skip one, now it’s seven. Right? Big chunk you’ve just missed. If you skip two – that’s where you’ll see it; is if someone’s not invested, it’s often they just don’t show up for the class.” (Ian, 116-117).

In these comments, he refers to the extra pressure on student attendance and participation exerted by the shorter, more intensive course terms characteristic of adult learning-focused programs. He also references the often acute crises, abuses, and loss that many students in this study described experiencing. Yet despite affirming these challenging institutional contexts as well as how well he sees Mission students persist amidst severe crises, he still characterizes student absence as a function of investment as opposed to one dimension of a much more complicated picture—like Ella’s.

While Ella’s experience of going before an administrative board after she stopped attending classes is significantly different in responsibility, reach, and orientation than typical interactions with instructors, especially adjuncts, like Ian, her reflections demonstrate a sense of hope, opportunity, and persistence that exceeds the boundaries of this study’s dominant practitioner narratives about student seriousness and commitment. At her lowest point, after “giving up” on herself, a turning point for her was not being treated as disinvested by

practitioners and administrators. They did not frame her interests and ideas as diminished by or irrelevant in the face of her personal struggles. Instead, she was given an opportunity to reflect on what these struggles helped her learn about her academic interests and purposes; to find renewed identification and motivation in college contexts; and to reconceptualize herself as both welcome and valued as an adult college student (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Graham et al., 2001; Schlossberg, Lassalle, & Golec, 1989).

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Study Design and Scope

This study investigated the learning practices and experiences of adult undergraduates pursuing baccalaureate degrees in adult learning-focused institutions. Designed as an exploratory, descriptive qualitative study, it involved interviews with a total of 13 adult undergraduate participants across two adult learning-focused institutions. Supplementary interviews were conducted with practitioners at both study sites. A phenomenographic research design (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton & Pong, 2005), drawing conceptually on an achievement-based model for student practices (Harper, 2007), was chosen for its higher education specificity, its focus on experience and process, and its potential for creating conversational contexts for students to reflect on how they go about, experience, and think about learning in college.

Frameworks

This study was informed by the Donaldson and Graham's (1999) Model of College Outcomes for Adults, which situates adult learning in and across a complex matrix of sociocultural factors. It also attended to Graham et al.'s (2000) assertion that "we need to understand adult learners' involvement through the meaning structures of the adult student" (p. 11). As a way of fostering adults' meaning structures, the selected phenomenographic approach to interview protocol design and facilitation reflected explicit attention to student "ways of meaning" (Marton & Booth, 1997).

Positionality

My history of practice with adult undergraduates informs this study's design and purpose. Specifically, my years of teaching, tutoring, and administering academic support programs at adult learning-focused postsecondary institutions have shaped my interest in more systematically representing and examining richness and complexity of adult undergraduate learning practices, and in bringing them into conversation with higher education scholarship. This commitment was instantiated in two ways throughout this study: (1) in response to these influences, I purposefully designed and conducted this study as informed by an achievement perspective on adult undergraduates (Harper, 2007); (2) in the design and facilitation of interviews, I thus privileged questions about student strengths, experiences, and conceptualizations of themselves as learners in and out of school. These choices necessarily inflected the ways in which I engaged with study sites, contacts, and participants.

Findings

Thematic categories. Study findings at both sites aligned with the same three major themes and associated subcategories: (1) students' learning practices, styles, and approaches, which encompasses three subcategories: writing, research, and group work/collaborative learning; (2) students' conceptualization of learning identities, perspectives, and experiences; and (3), students' learning influences, which encompasses four subcategories: the role of family, peers, and colleagues; academic choices, goals, and life integration/negotiation; and institutional contexts, resources, and relationships.

Variance

St. Clare University and Mission University findings demonstrated variance within the subtheme of the role of family, peers, and colleagues. St. Clare students described exclusively

positive relationships and support, whereas Mission students described difficult past and current relationships, and their impact on students' negotiations across academic and personal priorities and demands.

Diversity

An additional finding emerging across all three thematic categories concerns issues of diversity. Students reflected on multiple examples of class encounters in which issues of cultural and racial diversity was contested, minimized, or othered. In particular, students of color also described how they linked their decision-making regarding if and how to participate in class to questions about how their identities and perspectives would be taken up in their predominantly white classrooms. Findings align higher education literature on racial and cultural disparities, and the disproportionate pressures they exert on students of color (Harper, 2012, 2013; Quinnan, 1997; Saxonhouse, 2002; Stephens & Townsend, 2013). Findings also align with adult and higher education literature on practitioners' deficitizing perceptions of and engagement with culturally diverse students ((Cahill et al., 2010; Kasworm, 2004, 2010; Sissel, 2001).

Findings further highlighted the added complexities of multicultural exchange and dynamics in predominantly white adult learning-focused institutions. They demonstrate that these adult-specific contexts, while representing more equitable and democratic college education opportunities for adults within the landscape of higher education, are not immune to socially and educationally pervasive deficitizing assumptions, especially about diverse student identities, cultures, and meaning systems (Alfred, 2002, 2002b; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Harper, 2012; Marton & Booth, 1997).

Student Use of Time

Across both sites, findings demonstrate students' multifaceted emphasis on their use of time throughout their interview narratives, beyond the confines of specific questions about it. The primary emphasis of their interview narratives was on how their use of time reflected and enacted their deep commitment to prioritizing their education, despite overburdened schedules and often significant obstacles. While existing research and models specific to adult student learning and outcomes includes descriptions of adult undergraduates' use of time, there is more limited address of how time functions and is mediated across multiple intersections of students' learning and lives in and out of school (Donaldson & Graham, 1999, 2001; Graham et al., 2001).

Lundberg (2003) offers a causal model of adult student time limitations, which looks across faculty and peer relationships and out-of-school time. A relevant finding, with which the present study findings align, is that the out-of-school work and time commitments among students over 30 do not hinder their learning (Lundberg, 2003). Lundberg's (2003) model makes a significant methodological and empirical contribution to the understanding of adult undergraduate learning contexts and influences. However, its research design and descriptive scope are more limited in their application to or elucidation of this study's own design and findings.

Practitioner Identification of Students' Use of Time as a Marker for Students' Lack of Academic Effort and Seriousness About College

Despite the overt alignments between adult undergraduates and adult learning-focused instructional orientation, study findings describe practitioner perspectives that reflect deficit ideologies about adult student practices, priorities, and seriousness about college. Findings suggest that practitioners negatively perceive students use of time, and that they negatively associate student use of time and seriousness about college. Findings also suggest that

practitioners frame student life experiences and contexts as somehow misaligned with or inhibiting full participation in higher education culture, conventions, purposes, and sociocultural and economic capital (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Casanave & Li, 2008; Kasworm, 2004, 2010; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). However, findings also demonstrate internal contradictions within practitioner narratives, suggestive of more positive association between practitioner narratives' specificity of student examples and more nuanced or affirmative perspectives student lives and learning.

The Role of Reflection in Student Learning Narratives

Study facilitation observed and findings suggest that students actively took up the interviews as an opportunity to engage in deeply reflective learning, through which they articulated multiple and intersectional themes associated with their learning practices, choices, and perspectives (Bartlett, 2007; Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Schön, 1983). This may suggest the relevance of this study's conversational, semi-structured, phenomenographically-influenced interview format to participating student interests and/or priorities. Despite other findings that demonstrate practitioner framing of students as less engaged or serious about college, students demonstrated highly reflective learning narratives that contradict these deficit perspectives. Students' dedication of time to voluntarily participate in this study also suggests a relationship between student use of time and interest in pursuing reflective, collaborative, and reciprocal learning opportunities outside the confines of their already overburdened schedules.

Contributions to Research

This study makes multiple contributions to the scholarship on adult undergraduate learning practices and on the learning culture of adult learning-focused institutions.

Adult Undergraduate Learning Practices Situated in Adult Learning-Focused Institutions

This study offers descriptions of adult undergraduate learning practices situated within adult learning-focused institutions. It may inform expansions of methodological and conceptual considerations of adult learning practices and the under-studied adult learning-focused institutions that serve them. It may also inform practitioner understanding of the complex sociocultural and institutional influences on adult undergraduate learning.

Affordances of Phenomenography for Examining Adult undergraduate Learning Practices, Perspectives, and Priorities

Through employment of semi-structured phenomenographic interviews, this study offers descriptions of the ways in which students took up, defined, and engaged reflective learning opportunities and experiences (Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984; Tight, 2016). It also offers descriptions of how they narratively constructed their learning practices, identities, experiences, and priorities. This expands on existing models for adult learning outcomes and experiences that employ more structured interviews, surveys, and questionnaires (Donaldson & Graham, 1999, 2001; Graham et al., 2000). It also extends the application of phenomenographic interviews to adult learning contexts within adult learning-focused institutions.

Adult Undergraduate Use of Time

This study examines student emphasis on their use of time as a function of their articulated learning practices, lives, and priorities. While much of the literature on adult college learning and outcomes takes account of time as a factor in student learning, this study examines how student use of time is discursively constructed and negotiated across students' learning practices and lives in and out of school (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Donaldson & Graham, 1999,

2001). This examination suggests new ways of framing and examining time in relation to student learning and meaning structures (Kasworm, 2003; Marton & Booth, 1997).

Divergent Student and Practitioner Narratives about Student Use of Time and Seriousness About College

Further, this study examines ways in which practitioner narratives about students' learning demonstrate often contradictory statements about student seriousness in and fitness for college. It also offers an explicit focus on practitioners in adult learning-focused institutions. While multiple bodies of literature take complex account of practitioner perspectives on adult learners and of practitioner assumptions about and deficit constructions of adult learners, this study suggests new ways of examining the narrative construction of those perspectives in conversation with student narratives, toward a more complex understanding of how these divergent perspectives are instantiated in adult learning-focused institutions (Donaldson & Graham, 1999, 2001; Graham et al., 2000; Lundberg, 2003).

Lived Experiences and Constructions of Race, Culture, and Difference in Adult Learning-Focused Institutional Culture

Finally, it examines ways in which adult students discussed the racial and cultural dimensions of participation in predominantly white adult learning-focused institutions. Findings suggest tension between ways in which students construct and engage general notions of difference and specific issues of race and culture, including cultural learning repertoires (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). While there is a significant body of critical sociocultural that examines diverse students' experiences and negotiations in predominantly white institutions, this study offers a description and suggests new ways of exploring them in the specific context of adult learning-focused institutions.

Implications for Future Research

This study suggests multiple directions for future research on adult undergraduate learning practices and on the learning culture of adult learning-focused institutions.

Adult Undergraduate Learning Practices

In conversation with existing models for understanding adult student outcomes in higher education, this study's phenomenographic engagement of adult undergraduate learning practices suggests multiple directions for future research. Findings may support the expansion of methodological and conceptual engagement with adult learning characteristics, influences, and conceptualizations, with attention to how they are situated in sociocultural, economic, and adult-focused learning contexts. Also of relevance is attention to how these learning dimensions are mediated and developed across students' in and out of school lives. Findings could inform adult-specific instructional practice, as well as advising and academic support practices.

Adult Learning-Focused Institutions

There is also need for research on more adult learning-focused institutions themselves. This study's findings can inform future research on how adult learning takes place and is conceptualized at different adult learning-focused institutions. In tandem with research on adult learning practices, research could contribute greater understanding of how adult undergraduates perceive, take up, and experience learning in these institutions. This could contribute to a larger body of literature on adult learning-focused institutions, with attention to their learning affordances, functions, and contributions within the enterprise of higher education.

Practitioner Perspectives On and Alignment With Adult Undergraduate Learning Practices

This study's incorporation of contextual practitioner interviews, in conversation with student interviews, suggests opportunities for future researchers to look deeper into and across these constituents. Such research could elucidate practitioner perceptions, biases, and expectations about adult learners within and across these constituents. Individual constituents could be studied in more depth, such as advisors, tutors, and instructors, and put into conversation with each other. Future research could also generate more complex descriptions of practitioner philosophies, defined roles, interactions with students, and perceptions of student learning practices and priorities, toward informing practice and challenging deficit norms (Cahill et al., 2010; Kasworm, 2004, 2010; Sissel, 2001). Discourse analysis and dialogical frameworks may also extend examination of the discursive moves and contradictions within practitioner narratives. It could also elicit directions for reflective professional development and collaborative learning, toward enhancing understandings of and support of students.

Application of Phenomenography to the Study of Adult Learning Practices and Adult Learning-Focused Institutions

This study's employment of a phenomenographically influenced design suggests future researchers' extension of this methodology in adult learning-specific undergraduate contexts. It also raises questions about the methodological efficacy, instantiations, and relevance for expanding ways in which adult meaning structures in and about learning in adult-specific institutions can be elicited (Kasworm, 2003; Marton & Booth, 1997). It also suggests opportunities for researchers to expand on the present study through larger and more varied participant and site samples, toward deeper and more complex understandings of how learning is experienced and constructed across varied adult focused learning contexts and climates. Resulting descriptions of adult learning practices, priorities, strengths, and needs could inform instruction,

advising, tutoring, professional development, and curriculum development in adult learning-focused institutions.

Constructions and Implications of Adult Undergraduate and Practitioner Learning Narratives

This study's engagement of students' reflective learning narratives—as well as its attention to practitioner narratives, their deficit perspectives, and their internal contradictions—suggests opportunities for future researchers to take up a range of discourse- and dialogical frameworks for expanding the ways in which individual and collective meaning-making about student learning is constructed, experienced, and mediated in adult learning-specific institutions.

Practices and Discourses Around Race, Culture, and Difference in Adult Learning-Focused Institutions

Findings suggest that students consistently associated different perspectives and paradigms as exerting positive influence on their learning. However, findings also suggest the emergence of tensions in relation to more specific discussions and expressions of racial and cultural identities in the contexts of this study's predominantly white adult learning-focused institutions (Hikido & Murray, 2016; Kasworm, 2008). Future research can expand understanding of the constructions and implications of race, culture, and diversity within the context of both adult undergraduate populations and adult learning-focused institutions. It can also elicit directions for guiding critical institutional and instructional excavation of deficit assumptions embedded in their learning culture constructions diversity and inclusion, as well as directions for critically engaging issues of systemic racism and disparities (Alfred, 2002; Harper, 2012; Hikido & Murray, 2016).

Practitioner Constructions of and Exchange of Knowledge About Adult Undergraduate Learning and Lives

Findings suggest that instructors, administrators, tutors, and advisors represent unique relational connections with and knowledge of student lives, practices, and priorities. In particular, advisors demonstrate both prominent roles in student experience and nuanced knowledge of the connections across students in and out of school lives. Findings also suggest complicated, often deficit-laden practitioner perspectives on adult undergraduate lives and learning. Considered together, this study suggests possibilities for fostering greater cross-role information exchange and collaboration across these constituents.

Of note here is the institutional context of the branch campus. While branch campuses are not a specific unit of analysis or emerging theme in this study, findings suggest the relevance of understanding how faculty, administrative, advising, and tutoring roles are differently instantiated in the small branch campus context of both study sites. As Kreuger, Bebko, and Bird (2015) identify, there is limited research on branch campuses in the U.S., even though they comprise a large, complex proportion of adult learning-specific institutions and programs. Higher education literature more commonly attends to international branch campuses associated with U.S. institutions (Altbach, 2015). Future research can add to the descriptions of adult learning-focused branch campus instantiations, variance, positionings, and purpose (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Kreuger, Bebko, & Bird, 2015). It can also foster greater understanding of their unique flexibilities and limits in terms of organization, academic resource provision, and cross-divisional collaboration and meaning making about adult undergraduate learning.

Reflection

While this study was designed to address gaps in higher education research concerning adult undergraduate learning practices in adult learning-focused institutions, it was only made possible by the abundance of adult student interest, goodwill, and time at both St. Clare University and Mission University. The intensity and richness with which students shared their perspectives and celebrated their commitments cast these gaps in even starker light. Yara's affirmation that she "was meant to be a student" rings out as an invitation to practitioners and researchers, too—to take our own commitments, responsibilities, and opportunities as seriously as she does hers. We would do well to enjoin Yara and her peers in reflecting on and complicating the boundaries of our own adult learning paradigms and practices. As Ingrid reminds us, it is in the challenges and grey areas that we learn the most—"that sliding area that you just need to open up your mind. And reach for the stars."

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol – INTERVIEW 1 X¹ Students²

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview about your academic experiences and activities at X. I appreciate your willingness to make time in your schedule and share your thoughts.

Your participation in this study will contribute important insights to how adult undergraduate learning is understood in college environments. As we may have already discussed in planning for this interview, it is becoming increasingly clear how rapidly the number of adults in college throughout the U.S. has grown, as well as how influential adults like yourself have become within the landscape of higher education. Unfortunately, higher education research has not kept up with this growth. As a result, there currently isn't enough written about how adults make choices, navigate, and learn in college, especially in adult-focused colleges like X.

This is a critical time in higher education for bringing student voices and perspectives to the forefront. It has never been more important to have in-depth insights from adult undergraduates like you inform higher education research, teaching, and leadership – especially when it comes to making college more accessible, more responsive to, and more supportive of adult learning and goals. Your participation in this study and your perspectives are essential to helping change the conversation.

The questions that we will discuss today are anticipated to take roughly an hour to an hour and a half. You should have already been given a short handout with some short background questions about your program, degree track, and courses. If you haven't already filled it out, you can complete it at the end of our session today and leave it with me, or you can email it to me later this week. Our discussion today will cover three main topics: our first few questions will be about your learning style; our main discussion will be about how you approach your academic work, including any resources you may utilize; we will conclude with a few questions about your insights and advice for new or prospective students at X.

Please do not feel rushed in your answers or feel that there is any "wrong" answer. You should also feel free to skip any questions. Additionally, please do not worry if we do not touch on all questions during this interview or run out of time. Any answers that you share will be extremely helpful. We will have an opportunity to revisit any skipped questions, as well as any questions of particular interest to you, in the weeks after this interview. We may also revisit some questions and areas of interest for you in our second interview later this spring.

Before we begin today, I would also like to make a brief note about confidentiality. All identifying information will be kept fully anonymous. Only pseudonyms for names and places will be employed in any future study reporting. Also, today's interview will be audio-recorded. If at any point you would like the recorder to be turned off, just ask. Finally, you should also feel comfortable asking to skip questions at any point in the interview.

¹ Protocol introduction and questions will be customized for participant's institution and, where appropriate, specific campus location.

² Some interview topics and questions draw on the following sources: surveys from National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) and Council for Adult and Experiential Education (CAEL); Entwistle, N. & Ramsden, R. (1983). *Understanding student learning*. London: Croom Helm, 1983; Marton, F., Hounsell, D. & Entwistle, N. (1984). *The Experience of Learning*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

INTERVIEW SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION (TO PARTICIPANT AS LEARNER)	
QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your program and major at CSU? • How long have you been attending? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many credits do you have? How many do you need to graduate? • How long do you anticipate it will take to earn your degree? • Have you completed any college credit, courses, exams, or degrees elsewhere?
I understand that self-evaluation or self-management of learning styles and approaches is a big part of X's required college of business courses. Before we move into some specific questions about your coursework, could you briefly describe your learning styles and approaches?	<p>How would you describe yourself as a learner?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If I had asked you instead to tell me a little about yourself, <i>without</i> specifying as a learner – what would you have said differently? - Why?
Have the courses you've taken so far at X helped you better understand your learning style or approaches?	<p>Have your learning style or approaches changed at all for you since you started at X?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you share an example?
What role does class time play in your learning?	<p>To put this another way, how does the time you spend in class affect <i>what</i> you learn? <i>How</i> you learn?</p>
Have there been questions you've wanted to ask in class but did not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why or why not? - Can you give me an example? <p>- See about other probes: Have you asked questions in class that weren't answered as expected? That weren't helpful?</p>

INTERVIEW SECTION 2: REPRESENTATIVE ASSIGNMENT (LEARNING PROCESSES, CHOICES, AND PERSPECTIVES)	
QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
When does an assignment begin for you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In other words, when do you decide to start thinking about it? - To start working on it?
Could you walk me through a typical assignment?	So, for example, from the time you receive the assignment to the time you hand it in, could you describe the steps you take, the amount of time you spend, where you do the different steps/parts of the work, and so forth? Don't worry about being exact – I'm just interested in getting a general picture of how you go about your work.
What do you draw on when you are working on an assignment?	<p>In other words, what do you use to think about and complete it – in terms of skills, resources, materials, etc.?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why? - Where do you get these from? <p><i>Example: Your own experience or background? Class time? Course materials? Syllabus? Online course site? Classmates? Other people or resources from school? People or resources outside school?</i></p>
Do you talk to anyone about the assignment, or about the questions/ideas that it raises?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why or why not? - Can you share an example?
What matters for you when working on an assignment?	<p>Example: do you have specific goals, experiences, learning, etc. in mind?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you have to make decisions about time or effort? - How do you prioritize these? - What counts as learning for you?
What do you do when you encounter something you don't understand or know how to address?	
How do you decide when you are "done" with an assignment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does "done" mean for you? - Does it have to do with time? With learning? Anything else?
If you were giving advice to a new student who wasn't sure whether or not they finished an assignment completely, what would you say?	- Would your answer change if they wanted advice about whether they finished an assignment "correctly"?
What kind of assignments align most closely with your learning styles? How about goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you see connections between these? - How often do your assignments feel like a "match"? <p>How does that matter for you?</p>
What kind of assignment feedback do you get from instructors?	How do you make use of assignment feedback?
What kind of assignment feedback do you find most useful?	How often do you get useful feedback?

<p>One of the texts in the required self-management/leadership course is about becoming a "master student." If a new or prospective student asked for your opinion about what being a master student means, what would you tell them?</p> <p>Do you have any advice that isn't in the book or class? Does any of your advice diverge/disagree with the book or class? With advice someone else gave you?</p>	<p>- How much of being a "master student" has to do with learning for you? What other aspects are there for you?</p> <p>- Probe as needed: experiences, resources, relationships;</p> <p>- For all, clarify inside and outside of school.</p>
What were your main questions or concerns about learning in college before you came to X?	<p>- Do you still have any?</p> <p>- Have new ones developed?</p>
Can you share an example of something you wish you did differently when you started at X?	- What about something you wish you knew before you started?
<p>Can you share an example of something that has been particularly helpful for your learning since you've been at X?</p> <p>Have any staff or faculty members been particularly helpful or influential? Other students? People outside of school?</p> <p>What do you do best as a learner?</p> <p>Finally, can you share a favorite memory here at X? Something that stands out as important, enjoyable, or made an impression on you?</p>	<p>It could be a course you've chosen, an approach to doing or thinking about class work, a meeting or conversation with someone, a specific kind of resource, a specific source of information – anything you can think of, inside or outside of school.</p> <p>- Can you share an example of work you've done or learning in general at CSU that you are most proud of having accomplished?</p>
<p>Can you share an example of something that has been particularly helpful for your learning since you've been at X?</p> <p>Have any staff or faculty members been particularly helpful or influential? Other students? People outside of school?</p> <p>What do you do best as a learner?</p> <p>Finally, can you share a favorite memory here at X? Something that stands out as important, enjoyable, or made an impression on you?</p>	<p>It could be a course you've chosen, an approach to doing or thinking about class work, a meeting or conversation with someone, a specific kind of resource, a specific source of information – anything you can think of, inside or outside of school.</p> <p>- Can you share an example of work you've done or learning in general at CSU that you are most proud of having accomplished?</p>
CONCLUDING QUESTIONS	
QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
How did you hear about this study? What made you decide to participate?	- Can you share any advice about how to make research like this more accessible or easier for students to participate in? More meaningful?
Do you have any questions for me?	
Is there anything you expected me to ask but I didn't?	
Can you recommend anything I should keep in mind as I continue my study?	<p>- Are there any people you would recommend I reach out to?</p> <p>- Any information, classes, resources, etc. that I should check out?</p>

Student Protocol 2

Section 1: Perspectives and influences on learning

In our last interview, we talked a lot about specific approaches and steps that you take when doing your course work at X. I wonder if we can focus this time around on how these activities contribute to **what** and **how** you feel that you learn in school.

- In one of our first questions, I asked you if you could describe yourself as a student or a learner. Now that we've talked a bit more about how you go about your work as a student or learner, is there anything you would add or change about how you describe yourself?
- When you think about your academic history, going back as early as you'd like (through high school), how would you describe your evolution as a learner? (Probe for examples/explanation)
- Can you remember 1 or 2 memorable experiences, encounters, or realizations about yourself as a learner – that have taken place at any point throughout your academic history?
- What 3 or 4 words might represent who you are as a learner today?
 - (For S2 Student Interview on August 5th, 2 pm, ask about descriptors in their work signature: “**My Strengths: Empathy, Responsibility, Positivity, Intellection, Arranger**”)
- Next, we've talked a lot about learning in our last interview, and already today. We all come to conversations with our own ideas about learning, however. Could you talk a little about what learning *means* to you? How do you define it?
 - Where – or how – did you develop your definition and understanding of learning?
 - (OPTIONAL – This next prompt Q isn't fitting organically in this protocol/section so far – see if it fits in, here or elsewhere, but prioritize where participant takes convo) What role does it play in your life? What value do you place on it?
- To think about this from another vantage point, what do you think “counts” as learning?
 - What does it feel like when you're actively engaged in learning about or sharing your learning about something important to you?
- Could you share an example of a time when you felt really engaged in a learning situation (inside or outside the classroom)?
- How about an example of a time when you felt disconnected or distanced from a learning situation (inside or outside the classroom)?
 - What did these moments tell you? Have they influenced any changes in the way you feel about yourself as a learner? Have they influenced any changes in academic behaviors or decisions?
- We talked last time about being a “master” or successful student. How do you define your success as a student?
 - Have there been opportunities at X, in class or outside of class, to talk about learning (such as learning expectations or how to go about learning as a student at X)?

- Are there specific contexts for talking about learning – expectations, values, styles, anything – that you believe would be particularly helpful for new and continuing adult college students? (This could be in class, out of class, workshops, meetings, anything.)
 - Are there specific members of the X community who would be especially effective or helpful in fostering these conversations? (Whether formal or informal)
 - If so, could you share some examples?
 - Do you have any advice for faculty or administrators about making more time and place for conversations and advice about learning?

Section 2: Reflecting on your time thus far at X and advice for fellow students

This is the concluding section of our interview. I would like to build a little more on the advice about learning that you shared in your prior interview.

- Have any of your approaches to studying or completing assignments changed since you started at X? Since we last talked?
 - How? Could you share an example or two?
- Have any perspectives on learning changed since you started at X?
 - How? Could you share an example or two?
- Have any of these changes (or lack thereof) surprised you?
 - Why or why not?
- Since we last talked, what's been the most interesting or exciting activity or topic that's come up in class?
 - What assignment are you happiest with?
- Next, if you could *ask* for any advice – or ask anything else – of graduating students and recent alums, what would you ask?
 - Have you already asked for and/or received any such advice from advanced students or alumni?
 - *If yes, probe for contexts & examples*

Final possible Qs for this section:

- *If you were part of a committee or advisory team that made recommendations for improving students' academic experience, what recommendations would you have for the following members of the X community?*
 - *Faculty Academic advisors Enrollment advisors Academic resource staff, like tutors Librarians Anyone I haven't listed here*
- *What are your "wishlist" changes or features that you would like to see made at X? Any changes at all, from the most practical to the most ambitious.*

- *Some things may include but not limited to: policies; programs, courses or programs; resources; teaching or advising practices; location, frequency, or duration of class, appointments, or resources; class, resource, or appointment format (online, in person, hybrid), etc. etc.*
- Finally, what kinds of questions and topics do you think would be most helpful for teachers and researchers in higher education, like myself, to focus on in the future?

Section 3: Concluding questions

We have reached the end of our interview. I am truly grateful for your time and insights. Before we go, I wonder if you have any questions for me?

- Are there any questions that you anticipated I would ask but didn't?
- Do you have any advice or other information about this research project that you might like to share with me?
 - Is there anything you would suggest that I keep in mind about learning or teaching in general?

Structured Interview Protocol

X Faculty, Administrators, and Staff²

Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview about your work at X. I appreciate your willingness to make time in your schedule and to share your ideas. Your participation in this study will enhance understanding of how academic and student services are designed and carried out at adult-focused postsecondary institutions, including how they both reflect and address issues related to adult undergraduate learning.

The questions we will discuss today are anticipated to take an hour to an hour and a quarter and are organized into the following general topics: your role at X and your educational philosophy; your classes and any tutoring in which you're involved; and your perspectives on working with and supporting students at X.

Before we begin today, I would also like to make a brief note about confidentiality. All identifying details of this study's interviews will remain confidential. Also, today's interview will be audio-recorded. If at any point you would like the recorder to be turned off, just ask. You should also feel comfortable asking to skip questions at any point in the interview.

² Protocol introduction and questions to be customized for participant's specific position, institution and, where appropriate, specific campus location.

FAC/STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date:

Start time:

Section 1: Practitioner background

Questions

Prompt

What is your current position at X?

Could you briefly explain your role?

How long have you been at X?

If their background has not been solely at ALFIs, probe for their perspectives about similarities and differences between “traditional” and ALFI – in terms of what they focus on, how they perceive and approach their practice, how they perceive and approach students

Same goes for if they have experience at different campuses within the institution

What originally brought you to X?

Section 2: Institutional Context

Tell me about X University. What is it like here? What’s special about it?

What is it like to be an adjunct faculty member at X?

If relevant, also ask about experience as a tutor.

If you have taught elsewhere, are there any major differences at X, in your experience?

What do you think X offers students that they can’t get at other schools in the area?

What do you think X could do better for students?

Section 3: Teaching and Tutoring Contexts

What classes do you teach at X?

What format classes?

Do you have a format preference?

Could you share an overview of your teaching philosophy?

Could you share a recent example of this philosophy in practice?

Could you share an example of what a representative class session looks like?

How about a representative assignment?

If a new or prospective student sat in on one of your classes, what do you think they would notice first?

What do you hope students come away with understanding about a given class session's topic and materials? About themselves as learners?

Could you share a few representative questions that students ask in class?

What has surprised you most about teaching at X?

What have you enjoyed most about teaching at X?

What has taught you the most about your students at X?

This could mean types of class settings, encounters or interactions, assignments, etc.

What is one of the biggest challenges as a teacher (or tutor) you have encountered at X?

Specifically for tutors:

I know that tutoring sessions and approaches can vary so much...I wonder if you could walk me through a representative tutoring session?

Are there relationships between your teaching and tutoring at X?

What are some of the most common questions that students bring to tutoring sessions?

Are there any kinds of questions or ways of engaging you wish students would bring tutoring more often?

What do you think is easiest to accomplish in terms of supporting students at X? As a teacher?
As a tutor?

Section 4: Student Context

How would you describe the student population at X?

Are there any differences from other student populations you've worked with?

Has anything surprised you about students at X?

How do these student characteristics influence how you think about your role here?

How do they influence how you go about your work here?

What kind of interaction do you have with students outside of class?

Would you find it helpful to have more, less,
and/or different types of interactions?

Why or why not?

What do you think students at X are best at?

What do you think some of the challenges facing students at X are?

What kind of information and/or interactions with students here helps you do your job best?

What kind of information do you wish you knew about students here?

How well do you think X in general is meeting student needs?

How well do you think X in general is equipped to meet the needs of adult undergraduates?

Concluding Questions

Could you share a favorite memory from your time here at X?

How about an example of a student question,
interaction, or assignment that excited or
inspired you?

Something that represents or is emblematic of
either your experience, or the kind of
experience you try to foster for students?

Do you have any questions for me?

Are there any questions that you expected I might ask but didn't?

Might you have any suggestions for ideas, topics, or sources of information for me to look into or keep in mind as I proceed with this research project?

Is there anyone else at X you recommend I reach out to?

For member check, if not workable within interview: If a prospective student wanted to learn more about X, where would you suggest they look? Who would you suggest they talk to?

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT HANDOUT

Research Project Introduction and Invitation to Participate

Hello!

My name is Danielle Gioia. I am a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, and my dissertation is about adult undergraduate learning. I moved to the [City] area last year, and I am excited to be working with the [Site X] community in [City] for my project. I have enjoyed meeting some of you already and look forward to more chances to connect.

Why I'm doing this research:

The goal of my dissertation is to learn directly from adult undergraduates like you about learning in college. This goal has been deeply influenced by the working adults I have been lucky to serve over the years as a teacher and tutor.

However, when I began my doctoral studies, I was surprised by the lack of research on how adult undergraduates go about – and think about – learning in adult-focused colleges and universities. I believe that adult perspectives like yours are crucial for helping educators and school leaders better understand how to support student learning, and that these perspectives need to be heard by a much wider audience.

Invitation to participate:

My study is primarily based on one-on-one interviews. In my experience, these kinds of conversations offer the best, most relaxed opportunity to learn from individual student experiences and insights. I would truly appreciate your participation.

I invite all interested students to participate in two interviews through November:

- The first interview will likely last an hour or so, and it will be scheduled totally at your convenience. It will include questions about how you go about your classes and assignments.
 - If you have less than an hour available but are still interested in participating, just let me know. I can gladly shorten the interview to fit your busy schedule.
- The follow-up interview is typically a little shorter, and it will again be scheduled at your convenience. We will talk a little more about how you think about learning, as well as about advice you may have for adults like yourself who are either thinking about or currently attending college.
- Both interviews will be semi-structured, conversational, and relaxed in style. This means that you should feel free to take your time and to share ideas as they come to mind. You also should not worry at all about giving a “wrong” answer. There is no “wrong” answer to any question. Any and all thoughts that you choose to share will be extremely helpful.

I am happy to meet any day of the week, including evenings and weekends. I can also meet via any method that is most convenient for you.

For example, I can gladly **meet on campus** (or, if you prefer, at a **nearby coffee shop or library**). We can also **“meet” online via methods like Skype, FaceTime, or Google+ Hangouts**. Finally, I am always happy to **conduct interviews via phone** if preferred. I appreciate how busy you are, and I will do whatever I can to honor your schedule and preferred methods of meeting/talking.

What my research is *not* about:

I would like to emphasize that there is no evaluative component to any aspect of this study whatsoever. **I am expressly here to learn from you.** My study design prioritizes working adult undergraduates as the key source of information about learning practices, experiences, and perspectives. Your participation will help make this kind of student-centered conversation possible.

Your rights and confidentiality:

This project is not being conducted by nor is in any way affiliated with [Site X]. This is exclusively a project that I am conducting as a dissertation in fulfillment of my school degree and graduation requirements. Anything you say to me will be kept fully anonymous, and at no time will your identity be revealed in any reports on study findings. You will also be given an informed consent form that clearly outlines your rights. Your participation will have absolutely no impact on your grades or standing at [Site X].

Participation in this project is also completely voluntary. If you choose to participate and then change your mind, there is no penalty. You are free at any time to notify me that you want to leave the project. I will understand.

Next steps:

The next step is to contact me with your availability, including your preferred days and times to meet. I will do everything I can to accommodate your hectic schedule, and I will happily answer any and all questions!

I hope you will feel very welcome to get in touch:

Danielle Gioia
Cell: 215-796-5904
E-mail: dgioia@gse.upenn.edu

Thank you so much for your time! I look forward to hearing and learning from you.

— 

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Title of the Research Study: Understanding Adult Undergraduate Learning Practices in Adult-Focused Postsecondary Institutions

Protocol Number: 818883

Principal Investigator: (name, address, phone and email) Dr. Vivian Gadsden, Reading/Writing/Literacy Program, Penn Graduate School of Education, Fl. 3, University of Pennsylvania, 3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103; 215-573-3528; viviang@gse.upenn.edu

Co-investigator: (name, address, phone and email) Ms. Danielle Gioia, 1210 N. 62nd St., #316, Wauwatosa, WI 53213; 215-796-5904; dgioia@gse.upenn.edu

Emergency Contact: (name, address, phone and email): Dr. Joshua Steinberg, 1210 N. 62nd St., 316, Wauwatosa, WI 53213; 215-796-2784; jsteinberg@mcw.edu.

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This is not a form of treatment or therapy. It is not supposed to detect a disease or find something wrong. Your participation is voluntary which means you can choose whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate or not to participate there will be no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Before you make a decision you will need to know the purpose of the study, the possible risks and benefits of being in the study and what you will have to do if decide to participate. The researcher is going to talk with you about the study and give you this consent document to read. You do not have to make a decision now; you can take the consent document home and share it with friends and family.

If you do not understand what you are reading, do not sign it. Please ask the researcher to explain anything you do not understand, including any language contained in this form. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you. Keep this form, in it you will find contact information and answers to questions about the study. You may ask to have this form read to you.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to learn more about the nature and dimensions of adult undergraduate learning in adult-focused postsecondary institutions.

The format of this study is a dissertation designed to take place over the course of the 2013-2014 academic year. Its central focus is on the nature of and contexts within which adult undergraduates make choices, navigate, and learn in college.

Why was I asked to participate in the study?

You are being asked to join this study because the voices and perspectives of adult undergraduates are a key missing piece in the current qualitative research on learning in higher education, as are descriptions of and student experiences in adult-focused postsecondary institutions. As a result, this dissertation's research design prioritizes individual, in-depth interviews with adult undergraduates as its main source of information about learning practices, experiences, and perspectives. These student interviews will contribute to greater knowledge about how to improve higher education policies, programs, services, and teaching that better support adult learning and experiences in college.

How long will I be in the study?

The study will take place through the spring or summer terms in the 2014 academic year. This means that between now and May or June 2014, at your convenience, you will be asked to sit down for two one-on-one interviews. Each interview discussion is anticipated to last up to 1.5 hours.

If there is enough student interest and availability, you may be asked if you would like to participate in a focus group on the same topics as these interviews. You may also be asked to provide a short, guided campus tour; this campus tour may take place on the same day as a scheduled interview or group discussion if that is what you prefer. Finally, you may also be participating in classes in which Ms. Gioia is observing on a limited basis. These observations are not in any way evaluative of courses, facilitators, or students, and no audio or video recording of classes will take place.

The first interview will be scheduled during the winter or early spring at a time that is convenient for you and will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. The second interview will be scheduled during the spring at a time that is convenient for you and will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours as well.

Where will the study take place?

You will have the opportunity to choose a preferred public location on campus or adjacent to it, pending access to the campus buildings, in which to conduct each interview. In acknowledgement of your busy schedule, video interviews conducted via Skype or Face Time are gladly offered as an alternative, as are phone interviews, if those are more convenient for you. The interviews will be scheduled at a time that is most convenient for you. They may take place before or after a class or academic activity, or on the weekends. The only requirement for any campus location that you choose is that it is accessible to the public without special access during campus hours.

The chosen place for your interview is __, and the chosen time for your interview is on __.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to answer a series of questions about how you do and think about your academic work as a college student. The questions are considered “semi-structured,” which means that they are designed to allow for an in-depth conversation to develop. This also means that you should feel free to take your time, to share answers and examples as they come to mind, and to not worry about giving a “wrong” answer. There is no “wrong” answer, and any of the thoughts and ideas that you provide will be helpful.

Because these kinds of in-depth, conversational interviews can be long, it is anticipated that each interview will last up to 1 and a half hours. Both interviews will be audio recorded via a digital audio recorder. However, you should feel free to ask that audio recording stop for any question, and you should also feel free to skip any questions and to stop the interview at any time, for any reason. You may be asked a few clarifying or follow-up questions sometime during the weeks after each interview. Your answers can be shared with Ms. Gioia via email, phone, video chat, or in person. Any emailed responses will be printed upon receipt, with all identifying information redacted, and the original emails will be deleted.

What are the risks?

There is minimal or no anticipated risk. There will be no collection of information in group settings, only individual one-on-one interviews, which minimizes risk with regard to breaches of individuals’ confidential information. All identifying information and details shared during individual one-on-one interviews will be kept confidential.

It is also appreciated that the interviews represent a time commitment on your part and may ask you to remember or think about learning experiences or contexts that may be challenging. Every effort will be made to accommodate your preference for interview locations on campus, for alternate video or phone interviews, and for days and times that will fit your schedule best. You are also invited to take your time with interview questions, to skip any questions for any reason, to request that audio recording be stopped at any point in the interview, and to stop the interview and/or study altogether, all with no penalty to you.

How will I benefit from the study?

There is no benefit to you. However, your participation could help us understand more about how to support adult undergraduate learning practices and experiences, which can benefit you indirectly. In the future, this may help other people to improve policies, programs, services, and practices that have bearing on how adult undergraduates make choices in, navigate, and learn in college. Discussing learning practices and experiences may also be helpful or rewarding for you to reflect on as you continue your work and learning.

What other choices do I have?

Your alternative to being in the study is to not be in the study.

If you change your mind after deciding to join the study and want to withdraw, all that is required is a verbal statement provided in person or via phone to Danielle Gioia. Please contact Ms. Gioia at 215-796-5904 to set up a time to speak or meet in person to confirm your withdrawal. There will be no penalty for withdrawing from the study at any time, and you should feel no pressure or obligation to continue with the study if you feel that it is in your best interest to withdraw.

What happens if I do not choose to join the research study?

You may choose to join the study or you may choose not to join the study. Your participation is voluntary.

There is no penalty if you choose not to join the research study. You will lose no standing in your institution. Neither Ms. Gioia nor any faculty, staff, or administrators at the institution will seek or expect to change your mind. There is absolutely no pressure or expectation that you join the study, and the time that you have already spent learning about and considering the study is recognized and appreciated.

When is the study over? Can I leave the study before it ends?

The study is expected to end after all participants have completed all interviews and all the information has been collected. The study may be stopped without your consent for the following reasons:

- The PI feels it is best for your safety and/or health. If this is the case, you will be informed of the reasons why.
- You have not attended scheduled interviews or responded to initial attempts to contact you. If this is the case, you will be informed of the reason why.
- The PI, the sponsor, or the Office of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania can stop the study anytime

You have the right to drop out of the research study at any time during your participation. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decide to do so. Withdrawal will not interfere with your standing or evaluation in the institution in any way.

If you no longer wish to be in the research study, please contact Danielle Gioia, at 215-796-5904, and take the following steps:

- Set up a time to meet in person to talk about your concerns, if desired, and to provide a verbal statement of withdrawal.
- If you are unable to meet in person, a verbal statement will be accepted over the phone. Time to talk about your concerns will also be extended as part of this phone conversation if you desire.

How will confidentiality be maintained and my privacy be protected?

Ms. Gioia will do her best to make sure that the personal information obtained during the course of this research study will be kept private. She will be deleting all identifying information from all interview notes and transcripts; pseudonyms will be substituted for all participants and participation locations; she will be storing all study information in designated locked file cabinets and on a password-protected hard drive in her private home office, to which only she has access; and she will not be sharing any raw data with anyone outside of this study's principal investigator, who is also her dissertation chair and advisor, Dr. Gadsden. Information from this study may be published or presented, and a summary of the study may be presented to your institution; again, in all cases, absolutely no personal identifying information, such as your name and other personal information, will be used. However, this study cannot guarantee total privacy. Your personal information may be given out if required by law.

Who can I call with questions, complaints or if I'm concerned about my rights as a research subject?

If you have questions, concerns or complaints regarding your participation in this research study or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you should speak with the Principal Investigator listed on page one of this form. If a member of the research team cannot be reached or you want to talk to someone other than those working on the study, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs with any question, concerns or complaints at the University of Pennsylvania by calling (215) 898-2614.

When you sign this document, you are agreeing to take part in this research study. If you have any questions or there is something you do not understand, please ask. You will receive a copy of this consent document.

Signature of Participant

Print Name of Participant

Date

Title of the Research Study: Understanding Adult Undergraduate Learning Practices in Adult-Focused Postsecondary Institutions

Protocol Number: 818883

Principal Investigator: (name, address, phone and email) Dr. Vivian Gadsden, Reading/Writing/Literacy Program, Penn Graduate School of Education, Fl. 3, University of Pennsylvania, 3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103; 215-573-3528; viviang@gse.upenn.edu

Co-investigator: (name, address, phone and email) Ms. Danielle Gioia, 1210 N. 62nd St., #316, Wauwatosa, WI 53213; 215-796-5904; dgioia@gse.upenn.edu

Emergency Contact: (name, address, phone and email): Dr. Joshua Steinberg, 1210 N. 62nd St., 316, Wauwatosa, WI 53213; 215-796-2784; jsteinberg@mcw.edu.

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The format of this study is a dissertation designed to take place over the course of the 2013-2014 academic year. Its central focus is on the nature of and contexts within which adult undergraduates make choices, navigate, and learn in college.

Why was I asked to participate in the study?

You are being asked to join this study because the voices and perspectives of practitioners in adult-focused postsecondary institutions are not sufficiently represented in the current qualitative research on learning in higher education. As a result, this dissertation's research design includes interviews with practitioners to learn more about the academic mission, services, and characteristics of adult-focused postsecondary institutions. These practitioner interviews will contribute to greater knowledge about the contexts within which adult undergraduates matriculate and learn, as well as about how practitioners in adult-focused postsecondary institutions design and facilitate courses, programs, and services in support of adult undergraduate learning.

How long will I be in the study?

The study will take place over a period of 1 academic year. This means that between now and May or June 2014, you will be asked to participating in 1 single individual, one-on-one structured interview for this study. You may also be asked to spend an additional day in which you provide a short, guided campus tour; this campus tour may take place on the same day as a scheduled interview if that is what you prefer. During this time, you may also be teaching or otherwise participating in classes in which Ms. Gioia is observing on a limited basis. These observations are not in any way evaluative of courses, facilitators, or students, and no audio or video recording of classes will take place at any time.

The interview will be scheduled for either the fall or spring semester, at your convenience, and is anticipated to take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours.

Where will the study take place?

You will have the opportunity to choose your office or a preferred public campus location in which to conduct the interview. In acknowledgement of your busy schedule, video interviews conducted via Skype or Face Time are gladly offered, as are phone interviews, if those are more convenient for you. The interview time will also be scheduled at a time that is most convenient for you. The only requirement for the campus location that you choose is that it is accessible to the public without special access during campus hours.

The chosen place for your interview is at ____ and the chosen time for your interview is on ____.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to answer a series of interview questions about your academic role and philosophy. The interview is structured and anticipated to take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours.

The interview will be audio recorded via a digital audio recorder. However, you should feel free to ask that audio recording stop for any question, and you should also feel free to skip any questions and to stop the interview at any time, for any reason.

You may be asked a few clarifying or follow-up questions sometime during the weeks after your interview. Your answers can be shared with Ms. Gioia via email, phone, video chat, or in person. Any emailed responses will be printed upon receipt, with all identifying information redacted, and the original emails will be deleted.

What are the risks?

There is minimal or no anticipated risk. There will be no collection of information in group settings, only individual one-on-one interviews, which minimizes risk with regard to breaches of individuals' confidential information. All identifying information and details shared during individual one-on-one interviews will be kept confidential.

It is also appreciated that the interviews represent a time commitment on your part. Every effort will be made to accommodate your preference for interview locations on campus, for alternate video or phone interviews, and for days and times that will fit your schedule best. You are also invited to take your time with interview questions, to skip any questions for any reason, to request that audio recording be stopped at any point in the interview, and to stop the interview and/or study altogether, all with no penalty to you.

How will I benefit from the study?

There is no benefit to you. However, your participation could help us understand more about how to undertake research and support practitioner development at adult-specific postsecondary institutions, as well as about how to support adult undergraduate learning practices and experiences, which can benefit you indirectly. In the future, this may help other people to expand research in and improve teaching and learning-related policies, programs, services, and practices at adult-focused postsecondary institutions. Discussing your work and perspectives may also be helpful or rewarding for you to reflect on as you proceed with your work.

What other choices do I have?

Your alternative to being in the study is to not be in the study.

If you change your mind after deciding to join the study and want to withdraw, all that is required is a verbal statement provided in person or via phone to Danielle Gioia. Please contact Ms. Gioia at 215-796-5904 to set up a time to speak or meet in person to confirm your withdrawal. There will be no penalty for withdrawing from the study at any time, and you should feel no pressure or obligation to continue with the study if you feel that it is in your best interest to withdraw.

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When is the study over? Can I leave the study before it ends?

The study is expected to end after all participants have completed all interviews and all the information has been collected. The study may be stopped without your consent for the following reasons:

- The PI feels it is best for your safety and/or health. If this is the case, you will be informed of the reasons why.
- You have not attended scheduled interviews or responded to initial attempts to contact you. If this is the case, you will be informed of the reason why.
- The PI, the sponsor, or the Office of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania can stop the study anytime

You have the right to drop out of the research study at any time during your participation. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decide to do so. Withdrawal will not interfere with your standing or evaluation in the institution in any way.

If you no longer wish to be in the research study, please contact Danielle Gioia, at 215-796-5904, and take the following steps:

- Set up a time to meet in person to talk about your concerns, if desired, and to provide a verbal statement of withdrawal.
- If you are unable to meet in person, a verbal statement will be accepted over the phone. Time to talk about your concerns will also be extended as part of this phone conversation if you desire.

How will confidentiality be maintained and my privacy be protected?

Ms. Gioia will do her best to make sure that the personal information obtained during the course of this research study will be kept private. She will be deleting all identifying information from all interview notes and transcripts; pseudonyms will be substituted for all participants and participation locations; she will be storing all study information in designated locked file cabinets and on a password-protected hard drive in her private home office, to which only she has access; and she will not be sharing any raw data with anyone outside of this study's principal investigator, who is also her dissertation chair and advisor, Dr.

Gadsden. Information from this study may be published or presented, and a summary of the study may be presented to your institution; again, in all cases, absolutely no personal identifying information, such as your name and other personal information, will be used. However, this study cannot guarantee total privacy. Your personal information may be given out if required by law.

Who can I call with questions, complaints or if I'm concerned about my rights as a research subject?

If you have questions, concerns or complaints regarding your participation in this research study or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you should speak with the Principal Investigator listed on page one of this form. If a member of the research team cannot be reached or you want to talk to someone other than those working on the study, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs with any question, concerns or complaints at the University of Pennsylvania by calling (215) 898-2614.

When you sign this document, you are agreeing to take part in this research study. If you have any questions or there is something you do not understand, please ask. You will receive a copy of this consent document.

Signature of Participant

Print Name of Participant

Date

APPENDIX D: CODING PHASES, SCHEDULE, AND DURATION

Phase 1: Introductory Descriptive Deductive Coding

Duration: January 2015

Qualitative data analysis software and platform: Atlas.ti for Mac OS X

- a) In preparation for this introductory phase of deductive coding, 40 initial etic keywords were drawn from interview protocols and course observation field notes to guide preliminary cross-data deductive coding, toward generating a representative picture of keyword sampling.
- b) The presence of 40 high frequency and intensity keywords was identified, manually entered into the software, and applied to an initial cross-data analysis.
- c) Output in the form of associated quotations was examined via keyword quantity, frequency, and co-occurrence.
- d) Data visualization and memoing experimentally reduced initial keywords thematically to 19 more general keywords, which were employed to generate another round of cross-data sampling.
- e) Co-occurrences across 10 of the codes surfaced 2 emerging thematic codes representing a blending of etic and emic language and perspectives
- f) A new round of cross-data and individual transcript coding applied those 2 emerging thematic codes along with the existing a priori keywords
- g) Individual transcripts were examined via keyword count to confirm presence of keywords, sorted by word frequency, and assessed for context of keywords.
- h) Across this and future iterations of coding, the dual criteria of frequency and intensity (as indicated by context and co-occurrence) guided coding, with intensity and context

emerging as the more prominent criteria as coding phases deepened toward provisional saturation, evaluation, and theming.

- i) Descriptive memos were written throughout these steps, with a goal of documenting the etic keywords, their connection to emic patterns and directions for new keywords, beginning conversations between data and literature, monitoring keyword findings, and developing next-step keyword and coding directions.
- j) Co-occurrences of 6 out of 7 a priori keyword codes with the 2 emerging thematic codes suggested directions for deepening emically-driven and thematic coding

Phase 2: Blended emic and etic descriptive deductive coding

Duration: February 2015

Qualitative data analysis software and platform: Atlas.ti for Mac OS X

- a) To begin parsing student and practitioner data, the current output was reviewed and the original 40 etic keywords were separated into 40 student-specific and 34 practitioner-specific keywords, both of which were employed to facilitate another round of cross-data coding. 27 of the keywords overlapped, with an additional 4 codes representing different variations of the same word, such as “tutor/tutoring,” reflective of differences in approach to and conversation with participants.
- b) Two subsequent rounds of cross-data coding looked at linked quotations associated with each existing keyword and free coding of additional emic keywords and phrases that represented frequency and/or intensity
- c) To avoid inappropriately determining saturation, in vivo inductive coding was added to this round, with an eye toward identifying related and new keywords reflective of emic participant language and breaking open the data as much as possible.
- d) The resulting keyword count of 662 included the following: (1) in vivo emic and etic assignment of markers of participant identity (including familial roles such as “father,”

“mother,” “daughter,” “cousin,” etc.) and site affiliation; (2) many seemingly subtle or irrelevant but ultimately telling in vivo identification of emic keywords, such as “iCal” – which turned out to assist as a marker for an eventual major theme of “student use of time; and (3) in vivo, primarily etic deductive assignment of synonyms for major keywords or concepts, such as adding “comprehension” and “processing” to “learning,” in order to maximize ability to identify similarly important emic patterns and themes that may otherwise only tangentially fit the initial keyword architecture or elude it altogether.

- e) This keyword count was applied to another round of cross-data and individual transcript coding, accompanied by the prior round’s resultant distinction of two guiding data categories: deductive definition of 23 emerging participant roles and perspectives, and deductive documentation of 8 emerging modes of participant narrative, including “anecdote,” “personal history,” and academic history.” Ongoing descriptive memos and data visualization facilitated multiple theming category and relationship options.

Phase 3: Transitions to emically-driven inductive descriptive and evaluative coding

Duration: February-March 2015

Qualitative data analysis software and platform: Web-based Dedoose

- a) The prior Atlas.ti phase output was re-assessed and manually transferred to a web-based Dedoose platform. The switch of QDA tools and platforms benefitted personal computing obstacles that prevented further utilization of Atlas.ti for Mac OS X but was carefully considered and decided upon as a way to transition to emically-driven, inductive, and evaluative coding through a different lens and different capabilities that would resist the rote momentum of continuing in Atlas.ti.
- b) A cross-data analysis utilizing the prior keyword roster and markers for participant roles and narratives was run first and then reduced in vivo by inductive identification of emic-only words and phrases, resulting in a reduction to 200 keywords.

- c) Preparation of the keyword scheme to guide the next coding round reduced further to 99, accounting for variance among themes but omitting duplicative word/phrase forms or markers. Assigning these emic keywords to individual transcripts and evaluating the results suggested 3 predominant themes, 9 thematic sub-codes, and 26 thematic influences on or factors in the 9 thematic sub-codes.
- d) While memos were written throughout this phase, as with all others, evaluation of these results transitioned primary focus at this stage to analytic memos and data visualization to support code mapping and confirm and deepen theming.
- e) Vignettes from key themes were applied to analytic memos. One extension of this process was submission of a poster proposal to an adult learning-specific conference, for the purposes of refining analysis of key themes and workshopping at with a significant representative body of adult learning-focused practitioners.

Phase 4: Inductive code theming and patterning

Duration: November-December 2016

Qualitative data analysis software and platform: Web-based Dedoose

- a) The prior phase's primary, secondary, and sub-thematic codes were manually input into the new software tool and re-applied via cross-data analysis, the results of which were analyzed via data visualization and sorted into 2 major categories: 1 encompassing thematic "topics" of talk and 1 secondary identification of "types" of talk. Final assignment of participant demographic descriptors was also conducted, resulting in 25 tags ranging from participant type to student parental status.
- b) The "topics" of talk category consisted of 19 themes, which were each broken down into "student perspective" and "practitioner perspective." Where appropriate, additional breakdown into contextual sub-codes was noted, such as "in class" and "out of class," or "online" versus "on the ground" courses. The secondary "types" of talk category consisted of

8 student descriptors and 7 practitioner descriptors.* These two rounds confirmed re-occurrence and co-occurrence of the prior codes, suggesting a provisional saturation for the purposes of this initial exploratory report satisfactory to advance evaluative and analytical coding.

- c) Data visualization and memos represented the next phase of pattern identification, after which an additional round of individual transcript coding was conducted, with emphasis on examining patterns and overlaps within and across participant data categories.
 - d) *As will be discussed more in the subsequent findings and discussion chapters, it is important to note that these “type of talk” markers are oriented toward deepening this study’s thematic analysis; they were not designed to be and do not via these lenses function as representations of or proxies for discourse analysis. Rather, they are markers that deepen the thematic codes by identifying different approaches to description, such as a practitioner’s “emphasis on student anecdote” versus “emphasis on personal anecdote,” and, in so doing, representing an opportunity to examine dialogical and thematic interplay within and among participant categories.
- e) A subsequent round of in vivo coding, emphasizing code co-occurrence, and data visualization, including comparisons between both software tools employed to this point, was memoed in conversation with literature, resulting in a clearer picture of thematic patterns regarding 3 distinctions within the thematic code set: factors in student learning practices, the relationship between learning practices and choices, and influences on student learning practices and choices.
- f) After looking within and across those overarching thematic distinctions, data was further reduced into 20 thematic codes and 11 “type of talk” descriptors. Data visualization and memos contributed to a provisional final relationship mapping of patterns identifying factors in learning practices and influences on learning practices and choices.

- g) Throughout the aforementioned processes, vignettes from key themes were selected and developed into analytical memos.
- h) Deepened analysis of themes and associated vignettes was conducted toward development of a poster presented at an adult learning-specific conference, at which I had the opportunity to present and workshop ideas during two poster sessions. This presentation and workshop opportunity elicited confirming input from attendees, subsequent revisiting of data, and memos deepening analysis.

Phase 5: Final theming

Duration: January-March 2016

Qualitative data analysis software and platform: Atlas.ti for Windows

- a) Returning to Atlas.ti in a Windows format required manual input of most recent codes and descriptors reduced at the conclusion of the prior round of coding and analysis and afforded a fresh look at the prior rounds' output toward deepening and confirming theming.
- b) As part of this process, a cross-data analysis was conducted and 2 overarching code families were established, parsing the established thematic primary codes from the secondary dialogical "type of talk" categories.
- c) An additional round of cross-data and individual transcript coding was conducted, emphasizing code presence and co-occurrence, during which 6 refining thematic codes were added via in vivo inductive coding. These represented deepening of existing codes as opposed to additive.
- d) Data visualization and memos examined established themes and relationships thereof and confirmed utilization.
- e) A final round of transcript coding was conducted, during which 2 refining thematic codes and 3 general sub-codes were added via in vivo inductive coding. The general sub-codes were re-introduced from prior high co-occurrence keywords, reflected established thematic codes, and

were oriented more toward tagging existing thematic quotations for clearer identification of contextual orientation, such as presence of specifically emotional, positive, or negative statements.

- f) Thematic patterns and relationships were confirmed through ongoing data visualization and memos, and, along with associated vignettes, were applied to the development of final thematic outlines for this iteration of reporting's findings and discussion. Five "super codes" or master thematic categories were confirmed during this iterative process.
- g) The final code breakdown guiding the present report comprises 5 master thematic categories, 26 primary thematic codes, 7 refining descriptor sub-codes, and 11 secondary dialogical codes.

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